

Life of Elijah - Part 3

by Major Ian Thomas

Major Ian Thomas explores the life of Elijah, emphasizing the importance of obedience, trust in God's timing, and the necessity of humility in our relationship with Him.

Duration: 56:58

Scripture: 1 Kings 19:8-9, Psalm 34:10, Psalm 40:2, Matthew 6:33, John 10:27, John 20:19

Topics: "Elijah"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares stories of individuals who were at the end of their rope and on the verge of quitting. However, in these moments of despair, God showed His kindness and provision. One man, named John, was broken-hearted and ready to give up, but a gust of wind wrapped a placard around him, leading to a new unfolding story. Another man, Moses, spent forty years in the desert before God could use him. The speaker emphasizes the importance of giving God time and space to work in His own way and time.

Transcript

Beautiful day. Makes me homesick for England. I don't like the vulgar way you laugh.

We have a day like this every summer in England. Elijah. God's friend.

Back in the first book of Kings. And the 18th chapter. If you do as you're told, because you've been told what to do, even the birds will feed you.

But Elijah also discovered that if you're told what to do and do as you're told, the fire will burn. Even when the wood is wet. And remember that when the fire fell, nobody thumped Elijah on the back.

Nobody came up to him and said, man, you're right. They said, the Lord, he is God. They recognized there was only one person to congratulate.

They couldn't ever have credited Elijah with what happened. Only God. And we are to be to the praise of his glory.

What Paul meant was that others should look in our faces and having done so, they say, isn't Jesus Christ marvelous. This is the fantastic privilege that you and I have been given in our Lord Jesus to allow him now to be to us all that he then allowed the father to be to him. So that others in the son could see the

father, so that now others in us can see the son.

The Lord, he is God. We should leave other folks unshatterably convicted and convinced of that fact. And Elijah said to Ahab verse 41 of the 18th chapter, get me up, eat, drink.

There is a sound of abundance of red. He said to the King, you better have your lunch . Because the chances are in a very short time, you'll have to hurry. Ahab went up to eat and to drink.

And Elijah went up to the top of the cup, Mount Carmel. And he cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees. And he said to his servant, go up now, look toward the sea.

He went up and looked. And he said, there's nothing. Said Elijah, go again seven times.

Came to pass at the seventh time, which is the number of divine completion or perfection. It's a very simple way of saying, let God take his time. Give him room, give him time, just let him be gone.

You can never manipulate God. You can't twist his arm, no matter how loud you shout, because he isn't deaf. I told you yesterday, praying isn't a gun at God's head.

You're needed his feet. And only are we safe when we give him time and space to do things his own way. And in his own time came to pass at the seventh time, that the servant came back and said, behold, there arises a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand.

And immediately then Elijah said, go up, say to Ahab, prepare thy chariot, get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. Hurry, or you'll get wet. It's a very simple principle they enunciated.

We won't dwell upon it, but just throw it in as it were in parenthesis. A lot of folks, you know, a little concerned about guidance. How do I know the mind of the Lord? Well, the promise that God has given us, as all of you know, in Proverbs 3, 23, trust in the Lord with all your heart.

That's where it all begins. A heart relationship. And you know what your heart is.

It's your soul, your mind, your emotions, and your will, your behavior mechanism. And you trust God with that behavior mechanism. If you trusted somebody with your car because they needed transportation, on what basis would you trust them? Well, your confidence in their competence to drive.

If you didn't believe they could drive the thing safely, you wouldn't trust them with it. The fact that you place the car at their disposal is an evidence of your confidence. And having trusted them with your car, what do you expect them to do with it? Don't say, you know, don't wreck it.

Because if you'd thought they were going to wreck it, you wouldn't trust them with it. Trust in that there is inherent the expectation that they're competent. And so once you've trusted them with your car, all you expect them to do is drive it.

Nothing more complicated than that. And when you trust God with all your heart, what do you expect him to do with it? Drive it. That's all.

Just assume that he's intelligent enough to take over the controls. Sit in the cockpit and keep the thing airborne. In other words, by his indwelling Holy Spirit, teach your mind.

By his indwelling Holy Spirit, control your emotions. So that through your mind and emotions, he'll direct your will and thus govern your behavior. So that what you do then will be a valid expression by what you do say of his mind, his will and his purpose.

And of course, then God behaves. And that's righteousness. God in action.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not onto your own understanding. Don't consider yourself smart enough to grapple with the situation, come up with the right answer.

Because you don't have all the facts as God does. You don't know the end from the beginning. The base upon which we normally make decisions is the experience of the past, which may be totally invalid so far as the circumstance of the present is concerned.

Those factors that you know that concern the immediate situation, which may be inadequate, incomplete or inaccurate. And the foreseeable future. And that's anybody's guess.

No wonder we make lots of blunders. We make our decisions on the basis of the experience of the past, circumstance of the present, foreseeable future. Of all of which were hopelessly and inadequately informed.

But we have a God who knows exactly how the past relates to the present. He knows every detail of the immediate circumstance and knows the end from the beginning. And that's why when you let him run the show, you always land on your feet when other people are standing on their heads.

And the Bible simply calls that living miraculously. It isn't sensational. It is just a miracle.

And God doesn't ask you as a Christian to be either sensational or spectacular, but he does demand that your life be miraculous. That's all. And that'll do.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him.

What will he then do? Direct your prayers. Do you have to ask him to do so? No, don't waste your time. You don't keep on asking God to redeem you, do you? If you do, it's about time you quit.

Because every time you ask God to redeem you, you're calling him a liar. Because the moment you exposed your need, placed at his feet and looked in his face and said, thanks, he redeemed you. And sealed you by his indwelling Holy Spirit for eternity.

And he says, I'll never leave you nor forsake you. And you have entered into the rest of faith. And the rest of faith regarding your reconciliation to God is evidenced by the fact that you thank him that you are redeemed.

That your name is in the Lamb's book of life. And that you will never perish and nobody will ever pluck you out of his hand. Is there any less integrity in the promise of God, who has declared that he will direct you if you acknowledge him in all your ways and that he'll redeem you if you trust Christ as your savior? Why do you ask him for one and say, thank you for the other? If it's no less true that he'll direct you every step of the way, if you'll acknowledge him in all your ways and trust him with all your heart and not lean to your own understanding.

Well, so long as you're prepared to fulfill the moral obligation, thank him. That he is in the process of directing upon. He said he would.

The Psalmist puts it this way, commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in him. He will bring to pass. Literally, he is in action.

He is handling it. Now, if you commit a situation to somebody's hand who's never been known to fail in that particular situation, how much would you panic and how much would you be concerned? How much would you worry? Well, you wouldn't. Somebody else might on your behalf.

They come to you. Aren't you frightened? You say, no. Why not? He's handling it.

Anything else you need to know, if he's competent to do the job, commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in him, he's handling it. That's why two verses later, the eighth verse of the 37th Psalm, or it might be the seventh, rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. Wait patiently for him to vindicate his integrity.

So never ask God for guidance, a waste of time. Take care of your moral relationship and he is guiding it. On that basis, don't claim, of course, infallibility because your faith, your disposition isn't perfect.

But simply assume that God is doing exactly what he says. He is directing your path. And when you have to make the decision, make it.

On the best available evidence, on the assumption that he, by his Holy Spirit, is teaching your mind, controlling your emotions, so directing will that he'll govern your behavior. Having made the decision, somebody's called you. They say, I must know now.

You give the answer. You put the phone back to where it belongs and pace up and down, wonder whether you made the right decision. Is that right? Have a post-mortem.

Oh no, nothing like that. You simply say, Lord Jesus, you said that if I acknowledged you in all my ways, allowed you by your indwelling Holy Spirit, through whom I share your life right now, as you clothe your deity with my humanity, I made the decision on the best understanding that I had of the situation, on the assumption that you're doing exactly what you said you would do, direct my path, teach my mind, control my emotions, direct my will. So thanks.

Now, I'm pretty stupid and thick-skinned, and if I haven't got the message absolutely right, if I'm off to the right, shove me to the left. If I'm off to the left, shove me to the right. If I'm that stupid and committed such a boob that I've got all my wires crossed, cancel out and start again.

You're still directing my path. And that's the rest of faith. It doesn't mean that you're infallible, but it means somebody's on the job whom you're trusting to keep you, in spite of your stupidity and your thick skin and thick head, in the right place.

And he said he will do it. Now, I just want you to notice the little sequence of events that occurred here. First of all, what did Elijah say? There is a sound of abundance of rain.

Was it raining? No. Well, what did he hear? Nothing. It was simply one way whereby Elijah said, I've got a deep conviction that the moment is coming when God is going to end the drought.

But did he act on that inner conviction? No. No. You may have a deep inner conviction, but wait.

Wait. What are you going to look for next? Some simple external evidence. So he sent his servant, go up, look toward the sea, and he came back and said, nothing.

And Elijah did neither despair nor put the bit in his teeth and take over. He said, no, seven times. Second time, nothing.

Third time, nothing. And what is Elijah doing in the meantime? Waiting. He's got a deep inner conviction, but he's waiting for some tangible evidence from God that he's in the right direction.

Then on the seventh occasion, there was just a tiny cloud in the sky, a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And God gave that first tangible evidence that a deep conviction was on course. So he waited and then he acted and immediately sent his servant and said, Elijah, hurry and take your umbrella in case you get caught in the shower.

What do you do after that? Get on his hands and knees and plead for rain. No, he relaxed. He relaxed.

And there was a divine fulfillment. That was the simple sequence of events. Wait, act, relax, and then let God demonstrate that he's in charge, vindicate his integrity.

It came to pass in the meanwhile that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. The hand of the Lord was on Elijah and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and with all how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. 850. Then Jezebel sent a message to Elijah saying, so let the gods do to me and more also, if I make not thy life as the morrow about this time.

And you'll hardly believe that. He arose and went for his life. A man who could stand unashamed, unafraid in the presence of the king and proclaim a drought, thus saith the Lord.

A man who could stand alone on the mount, surrounded by 850 idolatrous priests, a wicked king and a hostile, sullen crowd. Unafraid, unashamed. At the threat of this painted hussy fled for his life.

Within 24 hours he was on the run. Can you imagine that? Aren't you glad God put that in the Bible? Because you see, we have a completely false connotation of those who have been such mighty men and women of God in the unfolding course of God's timeless plan. It's always a great comfort to me to know what a bunch of stupidities those disciples were before finally the penny dropped and something penetrated their thick skulls.

Some of your teachers or preachers or Bible class leaders, as many of you are, and you get discouraged because so little of what you say penetrates those to whom you speak, take courage. Because I've got good news for you, nobody had a duller Bible class than Jesus Christ. He taught them for three solid years and nothing penetrated.

Isn't that incredible? And finally, having warned them again and again of what exactly was going to happen, he'd go to the city of Jerusalem and they'd be delivered into the hands of wicked men and be done to death. Peter said, not so, Lord, that's not going to happen to you. But when it happened, they fled as the Lord Jesus had warned them, like frightened sheep, while they smote the shepherd.

What a bunch. And as I reminded you, was it yesterday when the women came and said, he's alive? They said, idle tales, go home, take six aspirins and have a good night. You'll be better in the morning.

What a bunch. It's kept me preaching for 50 years. It's one of the reasons why I accepted the invitation to come and talk to you first, because I thought to myself, you couldn't be worse than that lot.

And yet when something happened, they rediscovered Christ and the power and fullness of his resurrection. They let all God loose and evangelize the then known world in one generation. Turn the world upside down, change the face of nations.

What couldn't he do in your availability and mine to his divine action? Not what we could do for him because it's nothing. Hope you're not doing your best for Jesus. Because that's an exercise in stupidity.

The Lord Jesus said, without me, you can do nothing. So if he did the best, how much would it be worth? Nothing. And certainly if you're trying to get to heaven by doing your best, God help you.

Because even if you couldn't, you can't. Have you ever done your best? Isn't that a stupid thing to say? I'm doing my best to get to heaven. Even if you could get to heaven by doing your best, you'd never get there because you've never ever done your best.

You wouldn't dare stand up and say, as I look back over my life's histories, there's not a single situation which I couldn't have bettered my performance. Would you dare say that? Well, if you think you're getting to heaven by doing your best, stop playing the fool and discover how you get to heaven. And when you've discovered that, you'll come to somebody who said, I am the way.

Nobody comes to the father, but by me. We're so slow to learn because we listen without hearing. And that's why I'm glad God puts this in as he did those many other occasions when those who were, humanly speaking, spiritual giants evidenced the weakness of the common clay of which they were fashioned, as were you and I. He went for his life, came to Beersheba, left his servant there, and he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, verse four, and came and sat down under a juniper tree, and he requested for himself that he might die.

And that was pretty stupid too. He could have stayed behind and Jezebel would have taken care of that. He said, it is enough.

I'm through. Now, Lord, take away my life. I am not better than my father.

God probably said, who said you were? Who's been kidding you? How long have you been kidding yourself? No. Elijah under a juniper tree. Isn't that incredible? When a man sits under a juniper tree and says, I only am left, he's either on the verge of a nervous breakdown or he's got too big for his boots.

And it doesn't matter whether a man is suffering from shattered nerves or a swollen head. From that moment, he's useless to God or man. Where was the chink in his armor? How could this have happened to a man like Elijah? Well, I deliberately omitted one verse in the preceding chapter.

Look back to the 22nd verse of the 18th. It was the occasion when Elijah had called the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of the groves and addressed himself in their presence to the crowd. Elijah said unto the people, verse 22, I, even I only remain a prophet of the Lord.

That was the chink in his armor, the folly of feeling indispensable. I only am left. And God said, I got news for you.

I've got 7,000 in reserve. You and I are never indispensable to God. No individual, no movement, no organization.

There's no single institution in this world that can say God has imposed upon us the burden of evangelizing this world to the finish. Those people are deceiving themselves. Any individual who behaves that way is deceiving himself.

God doesn't need any champions. We are never indispensable to him. He is always indispensable to us.

This was the chink in his armor. I only am left. And when a man considers himself to be indispensable to God's timeless purpose, then he will soon be crushed by the burden of his own self-imposed load.

Nothing in all the world quite so abysmally pathetic as a man preoccupied with his own importance. And that was the problem with Elijah. Quite a number of years ago, I was invited, amongst others, as are each year, faculty speaking at the Torrey Memorial Bible Conference in Los Angeles based upon Biola.

They invite folks from different parts of this country and other parts of the world. And they not only have the meetings on campus, but they have meetings in various local churches within a hundred miles radius. And on that particular occasion, one of the faculty was Dr. Walter Wilson, who's now with Christ, whose name some of you may well know, for he wrote some very excellent books that are still available.

And he himself, though a medical doctor, was the pastor of a very gigantic church and founded a Bible school, all of which were of excellent spiritual substance and caliber. And he was one of the panel of speakers. And because of his ministerial experience, they invited him to speak at a luncheon for pastors who had been invited, some 300 of them.

And in the course of his address, he echoed many of the principles that I had been seeking to share with you in these few hours. And he was talking about this stupidity of being self-important. He said there was an occasion when I invited the pastor of another church, enormous, a real empire that a man had built around himself.

And he invited the pastor of that church to occupy his pulpit. And he explained to these pastors at luncheon, he said the man replied that he would very much enjoy the opportunity and appreciated the kindness of my invitation. But he regretted that in his absence, there was nobody that could ever occupy his pulpit.

And so he had to decline the invitation. So Dr. Wilson told the assembled company, I got in touch with him and I asked him for how long he'd been ministering in that church family of many, many, many thousands. He said 27 years.

And then Dr. Wilson said, I asked him during that 27 years as a conservative estimate, how many would you consider among the men had been consistently under his ministry for at least 10 years. And as a conservative estimate, the man replied some 600 out of the thousands in his congregation had been consistently under his ministry for 10 years. So Dr. Wilson then said, well, if you've been pastor of that church for 27 years, you have 600 men who've been consistently under your teaching for 10 years.

And there's not yet one single person that can occupy your pulpit in your absence. Then quite obviously your, your ministry has been a dismal failure. And if I were you, I'd resign.

And within three weeks he did. And when he resigned, he was right. The folly of feeling indispensable.

And as he lay verse five and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him and said, breakfast is served. This is the kindness of God. Here's a man at the end of his rope.

He's on his back. He's at the moment of despair, the very threshold of quitting. Have you been there? And God sends his angel and feeds him.

He looked and behold, there was a cake bacon on the coals and a cruise of water at his hand at his head. And indeed, and he drank and he laid him down again and slept. It wasn't long before the angel tapped him on the arm and said dinner is served.

The angel of the Lord came the second time and touched him and said, arise, eat. The journey is too great for you. Isn't that kind of God? You remember what it says in the 42nd chapter of Isaiah and the third verse, a bruised reed.

He will not break nor quench the smoking flint. That's the kindness of God. There will be occasions in your life when you'll find yourself on your back.

And I may be talking to somebody right there. Now coming to this conference may have been your last fling deep down in your heart. You've been saying, if there isn't something more to the Christian life and the rat race that I have known, then I find no option, but to quit.

That's always possible. I've never spoken to a group, a group like this, where there isn't somebody in that area. And if it hasn't happened yet, chances are that soon will, unless you've already made the glorious discovery, which alone can sustain you unless you forget to remember.

He won't crush you. He doesn't jettison you. If you feel the moment of despair, if you feel that you've failed tragically, he's not going to throw you over the edge or put you in the trash can.

He didn't do that when he first sought you, because he came to seek and save that which is lost. It's a marvelous thing to be lost. You see, if you're lost, you're wanted.

You don't throw lost things in the trash can. You look in the trash can for lost things. That's why the Lord Jesus was always getting into trouble for keeping bad company.

He's going to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And that was the occasion, remember, Luke 19, Zacchaeus, that fat little man hiding up a tree, not the first to try to hide from God behind a few leaves. He said the son of man has come to seek and to save that which is lost.

It's a marvelous thing to be lost. If only it will remind you that there's somebody who wants you. And if he sought you that far, having redeemed you, he's not likely to forsake you just because you get wounded and you begin to bleed.

He'll send an angel to feed you. And one of the most exciting things in my life has been seeing that happen in so many occasions, under so many various circumstances, because God is essentially original, gloriously unique. He never squeezes us into the same mold and makes us all as moldy as each other.

If you get shocked sometimes because God in another individual is being original, it's probably because you've never allowed God to be original in you. You've allowed somebody to press gang you into some procedural conformity, which will then be equated with your spirituality. And it means nothing.

About nine, 10 years ago, a pastor of a church in Florida got to this point. He sat under his juniper tree. He was a converted man.

He believed the Bible from cover to cover, had already invested many of his years in proclaiming Christ, but he was totally discouraged and became in his discouragement, cynical. God, if this is all there is to the Christian life, what I've known as I've sought to serve you, then I'm through furthermore quitting. I'm never going to church again.

Unless I discover there's something better than what I've had. And you can be just in that frame of mind, though you believe the Bible from cover to cover, can look back to the moment and the place of your conversion and may have been heavily involved in all kinds of Christian activity and with no little sincerity. And only three times in some five years, did he ever cross the threshold of a church again, in each instance on some social occasion.

About four years ago, by a strange sequence of events, I was invited to conduct a week of meetings in an Episcopal church in Sarasota. It was quite a unique week, but we had a whale of a time, really fantastic. God had several friends in that community and I met him.

For only one good reason, I was sent and went. And I wondered at first just where I've been put, mind you, when I had to walk down, you know, the aisle behind a big brass cross and acolytes all dressed up like angels floating along on either side. All my Baptist friends who came to join the meeting were a little surprised.

Now, I was brought up in the Anglican church and we have some very, very wonderful people in that church in England. It's the main line thrust evangelically in my country today. So I wasn't all that shocked.

They, you know, found it difficult to know when to get up and get down. And we were bobbing all over the place. But that was fun, you see, and we had some tremendous blessing.

Now, just three weeks before I was due for that week of meetings in Sarasota, this pastor had quit some five years before, got out of his car to cross the sidewalk to go into a store. And as he did so, he saw on the wall a placard with my face on it. Well, that in itself was shocking enough.

He recognized the name, but it didn't faze him because he was no longer interested. But as he proceeded across the sidewalk, a gust of wind came precisely at that moment, whipped it off the wall and wrapped it around his chest. That's personal work.

Well, it fell off his chest under the pavement and that face looked up at him. And I suppose to get rid of the face, he picked it up and put it in the back of his car and left it there and forgot it until three weeks later on the Sunday he got out his golf clubs to play golf, as he had done for five years every Sunday, to put them in the back of the car, saw that face again and it reminded him of the meetings and for some strange reason took his golf clubs back, stuck them in the house and came to that first service. I didn't know he was there.

And he came every morning and every night, twice a day. The end on the Friday evening, among many, many others who said goodbye, he shook my hand and very vaguely I remember somebody saying, thank you. I too was once a preacher.

It was about 18 months later, I was in Sulphur, Louisiana, conducting a week of meetings there in a church and on the Tuesday I got a call from a man in Abbeville on the Gulf Coast. He said, you won't remember me or even my name, but you might just remember the circumstance in Sarasota when on the Friday night a man shook you by the hand and said, thanks. I too was once a preacher.

He said, I'd like you to know that Jesus Christ is back in business. Not I on his behalf, but he through me. And I'm pastor of the First Baptist Church in Abbeville and I'm coming tonight with 14 of my men to attend the service this evening.

And he came. And Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday he commuted 200 miles each evening and brought a whole bunch of his people night after night. On the Wednesday night, I asked him to give his testimony.

He told us all then the things that I've just told you. And about 15 months ago, I was in his church and we had a wonderful week. And at the end of that week, Friday night, when everybody had gone, I was just packing up my odd things and a boy came in, 15 years of age.

He was obviously in deep distress. He said, I need Christ. And I had the joy of instructing him very simply as to God's plan.

And we pray together. And he received the Lord Jesus November last at our torchbearer conference, Thanksgiving conference in Texas at his hill together with the youth director and three others. They'd driven 14 hours through the night to attend for a couple of days and then drive 14 hours back.

And, uh, just before they went, the others having taken their leave, the boy lingered a little bit behind. He said, I never had the courage to tell you this before, but on the Thursday night, before I came to you on the Friday received Christ in my bedroom, I put a gun to my head. And only in the last second before I pressed the trigger, a little voice inside said, John, God's got something so much better for you than that.

His father's a millionaire owns a shipyard down the Gulf, but there wasn't anything worth living for. Now he can't, uh, he can't wait to get into Bible school and learn how he too can share Christ with us. And David and I were in his home.

We were back for another week of meetings in that church just about three weeks ago. And we shared John's home. This to me is the miraculous.

You see nothing spectacular, nothing sensational, just a broken hearted man fit to quit who gets out of his car and a gust of wind takes a placard off the wall and wraps it around his chest. And then a year later, a boy with a gun to his head, here's the voice of God and said, John, something better for you than that. And that's just the beginning of a new unfolding story.

All you can do is stand back and watch and say, thank you. And know that God just happens to be big enough for the job. God is kind and he'll feed you when you're hungry.

He'll lift you when you're down. And he arose and he'd eat and verse eight, he drank and he went in the strength of that meat 40 days and 40 nights. And to horrible amount of God.

And he came further onto a cave and he launched there. When you read the Old Testament in particular, of course, the New Testament too. But what brings the Old Testament alive is the sheer consistency of God, the Holy Spirit in the revelation that brings, remembering that these are they, the scriptures that testify of him.

And magnificently illustrated in the Old Testament, all those spiritual principles that are so clearly enunciated for us in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus, you may remember, taught in parables and allegories. Both the image of one thing in the picture of another.

Except that a parable is normally a story that is thought up just to illustrate a principle. The Lord Jesus spoke of the wedding feast. That was a parable where the first guests refused the invitation.

So he sent out to the highways and the byways, the Gentiles. He invited you, he invited me to the wedding feast. And the one you remember, who's too proud to wear the wedding garment.

And all went well because you can always find somebody who gets you in. The unfaithful servant. That's really the parable of the unfaithful servant.

The one who persuaded somebody too proud to wear the wedding garment that he'd get him in round the back. And he got him in. He got him in.

And all was well, swanking around the only person in his own clothes. The filthy garments of his own self-righteousness. All went well until what? The king came.

And all eyes followed the gaze of the king. And in awful silence that you almost could have cut with a knife. The king walked across and said, friend, how can this bow in without a wedding garment? And the man who had so much to say to the faithful servants.

Was speechless. And the Lord Jesus said, the king commanded him to be cast out into outer darkness. Well, that's a parable.

Pretty powerful. Especially if you're sitting here without the wedding garments. Which is Christ himself, his righteousness, with which alone clothe, God can accept you in the beloved.

And I didn't think that up. Don't blame me. Christ thought that up.

Because he is the way. Now that's a parable. But allegory is simply a historical record in the Old Testament that magnificently illustrates spiritual truth.

Said the Lord Jesus, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up. That whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have that life, which alone is eternal. Christ everlasting life.

As Jonah was three days, three nights in the belly of the well, so shall the son of man be three days and three nights. That's why he wasn't crucified on Friday. Must have been Thursday.

The son of man shall be in the tomb. These allegories. And so what makes the Old Testament come alive is to recognize the language of the Holy Spirit.

Doesn't happen overnight. Horeb. Does Horeb have a connotation for you? I like to call it, in England we'd say God's flunk hole.

But I think you'd probably call it God's flunk hole. Because the flunk hole is for those who flunked out. That's Horeb.

And that's where Elijah found himself when he fled for his life. He ended up in Horeb. The flunk hole for those who flunked.

Think of anybody else who flunked and ended up in Horeb. His name was Moses. Keep the place there for a moment in the 19th chapter of 1 Kings, but turn to the third chapter of the book of Exodus.

You remember the background of Moses. We're introduced to him by a squeak in the bulrushes. When hidden by his mother, he was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter.

And of course, that little sister of his, she was pretty smart. When Pharaoh's daughter was looking around for a nurse, she came up and said, you want a nurse? And she said, yeah. We said, I got a nurse.

And went off and got his mother. That was smart, wouldn't you say? And so Pharaoh's daughter employed Moses' mother to take care of her own child. First instance of social welfare.

Where the government pays a mother to take care of her own children. And so Moses, you see, was reared in this royal connotation with all the kudos of being raised as a prince. With everything and all the education that money could buy.

Until at the age of 40, we're told in the book of Acts, he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was mighty in word and deed. At the age of 40, he'd got the world at his feet.

Not only all the backing of the royal court, not only all the education that money could buy. He, on this occasion, if you care to read the rest of the story in the second chapter of the book of Exodus, he was all dolled up like an Egyptian prince. And wondered why his kith and kin were unimpressed.

When he came to succor one of his own Hebrew brethren who was being thrashed by an Egyptian taskmaster, remember? And looking this way and looking that way, but forgetting to look God's way. Assuming the full responsibility for the operation. Concerned and preoccupied not with what God thought, but what his peers thought.

When he saw no man, he slew the Egyptian. Couldn't even bury him, left his toe sticking out of the sand. Because within 24 hours, the deed was known and he too fled for his life.

When Pharaoh heard this thing, verse 15 of chapter 2, he sought to slay Moses, but Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian. He sat down by a well. Within 24 hours, a man on the threshold of unparalleled success, he couldn't lose, he was a winner from the start.

Was reduced to dust and ashes. Moses, verse 1 of the third chapter, kept the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the backside of the desert and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.

Ended up in the flunk hole. And there he was for 40 years. Can you imagine that? 40 years it took man to make Moses somebody.

40 years it took God to make Moses nobody. But until God had reduced Moses to nothing, he couldn't even begin. What years of frustration must these have been as he shoveled a handful of sheep around the backside of the desert? His wife's husband.

Everywhere he went, he was introduced as his wife's husband. Employed by his dad-in-law. All the dreams that once he had dreamed, had dissipated into space.

Then the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire, because God hadn't forsaken him. Out of the midst of a bush, and he looked and behold, the bush burned with fire and the bush was not consumed. It just burned and burned and burned and burned and burned.

You know the story. He burned. He went round and rounded up a few stray sheep, brought them back and he had a look at the bush and it burned and burned and burned.

So he then took his sack lunch out and sat in a cactus bush and ate it. And then when he'd eaten it and put the wrapping in the trash can, he looked at the bush and what do you think? It burned and burned and burned. And he thought to himself, that's a very remarkable bush.

Have you ever looked at some other Christian and thought to yourself, what a bush? Because somehow, whenever you meet them, they burn and burn and burn and burn and burn. I wonder if you were ever as smart as Moses. There came a moment when he said, I will now, verse 3, turn aside and see this great sight.

Why the bush is not burned? And it isn't till then, you see, that finally we discover the secret of a bush that burns, without being reduced to ashes. He was making still, of course, a fundamental error. As all of us know, he thought the secret lay in the bush itself, that it must be a very remarkable bush.

But when he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush and said, Moses. And he said, here I am. And God said, draw not thy hither, put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

Moreover, he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. You're not in the presence of an amazing bush. You're in the presence of a mighty God.

You see, Moses, some 40 years ago, you thought you were some bush. You dandied yourself up in that beautiful uniform of an Egyptian prince and went out to throw your weight around. You looked every way but my way.

Self-important, motivated by the best desire in the world, deep compassion for your own kith and kin. But you try to do God's work, man's way. You think this is a remarkable bush.

I'll tell you something, Moses, if this bush had been seeking to sustain the flame by its own substance, it too would have burned itself out within 24 hours and been the heap of ashes you've been for 40 years. If this bush, Moses, burns and goes on burning, it's nothing to do with the bush. It's simply because there's God in the bush.

And of course, this is enunciated again and again throughout the New Testament, and it's what the Lord Jesus constantly said, without me, God in the bush, you are and can do nothing. And the tragedy is there are so many sincere, earnest, nobly motivated Christians who are still doing their best for Jesus because normally they're exhorted so to do. At the end of all their days, when that final trial comes, when you and I will be tested, not for our judgment but for our reward, they'll stand in that heap of ashes that all remains of the wood, the hay, and the stubble of a wasted life.

Don't imagine that that is simply going to be those who, though born again, went off on the bottle or ran away with the secretary or became lukewarm and discouraged and quit. No, this involves all those who've been heavily engaged but never learned the first principles of the oracles of God and still perpetuated in their churchmanship the satanic fraud that a man can be man without God and therefore a Christian can live the Christian life without Christ. What's the difference? No difference.

God said, I'm going to do through you 40 years later what you try to do for me 40 years too soon. But you see, God didn't leave him to languish but whored him, even though it was the funk hole for those who had flunked because God is kind and did by Moses what Moses tried to do for God. Turning back to the first book of Kings in the last moment, no we've got no last moment, but let me just introduce you to this by way of conclusion and just to whet our appetite for the things that have come tonight.

In that 19th chapter and verse 9, he came thither unto a cave and lodged there and behold, the word of the Lord came to him and he said, what doest thou here, Elijah? What are you doing here? That's a question that God never ever needs to ask of any boy, girl, man or woman who's been sent, went and put. Because God knows why they're there. He put them.

It's only when you and I are in a place other than where he has put us. Does God have to level this question, say, what are you doing there? What are you doing there? Now if you'd gone to Elijah as he stood before the king and pronounced the drought and said, what are you doing there? He'd said, put. I was sent and went.

If you'd asked him what he was doing down in the brook Cherith, he'd say, I was sent and went. If you'd asked him what he was doing there in Zarephath with that widowed woman with her handful of meal and a bow, what are you doing here? Do you always keep this kind of company? He'd have looked you straight in the eye and said, put. If you'd asked him what he was doing on Mount Carmel in the presence of that hostile, sullen crowd, those idolatrous priests and the witty king, what are you doing there? Put.

I was sent and went. And I know that where I'm put is where God wants me. He can take the consequences.

But as I suggested last evening, when God said to him, what are you doing here, Elijah? He couldn't say I was sent and went, or he could say I was spent and went. And when you're spent and went, you're shot. And that was Moses.

And you see, Horeb is the funk hole for those who flunked out because they were spent and went and shot. And God said, go forth. Stand upon the Mount before the Lord.

Because you see, Elijah had reduced a living, vital, dynamic, working, adventuresome relationship to a living God, to a miserable creed that was monotonously repetitive. In verse 10, he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine

altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword, and I even, I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away. That was his creed.

And when a little while later, God said, what are you doing here, Elijah? Verse 13, he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forgotten thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword, and I even, I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away. Isn't it tragic when a man's vital relationship to a living God is reduced to a monologue, an empty, lifeless, sterile creed that has lost the dynamic of the conscious sense of God's presence. Go forth, said God, stand upon the Mount, behold the Lord before the Lord, and behold, the Lord passed by in a great and strong wind, rent the mountain, breaking in pieces in 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.

God was teaching Elijah that he'd become preoccupied with himself and with his circumstance, and ceased to be preoccupied with God. And after the earthquake, a fire, the Lord was not in the fire, but then, a still, small voice, and he was back once more in the conscious presence of a living God. When you and I get preoccupied with the sensational and the spectacular, we cease to live the miracle that derives alone from a conscious relationship to a living God who makes life every moment of every day, that fabulous adventure that life was always intended by God to be, a still, small voice.

Not in the earthquake, or the fire, or the storm, or the wind. We're living in an experiential age with a big thing, a sensation, and the spectacular is the order of the day. We're success-oriented.

Turnover is more important than the quality of the end product. Statistics, more important than substance, but God is unimpressed. He's waiting for you and for me to come out of the earthquake, out of the fire, and out of the wind, and be alone with God, and reassess where we are, and our relationship to him, and you'll never hear until you're quiet enough.

Be still, God said. I want you to know something. It's the only thing you really need to know.

What is it? I'm God. Let's pray. I'm grateful again, dear Lord, for all that you have to teach us out of this amazing book.

Thank you for the gracious ministry of your Holy Spirit to our need. Thank you for your kindness. For you feed us when we're hungry.

You strengthen us marvellously by your presence when we feel so weak. Your strength is made perfect in our weakness. You give us hope when we're fit to quit.

Thank you that you never quenched us, nor broke us, but you sustained us. And it gives us high hope for the future. We thank you, dear Lord, that in the measure in which we get back to where we belong, if ever we've strayed from that place where you put us, and tomorrow we'll once more be as big as God himself.

For all of this, we give you thanks in your own dear and precious name. Amen.

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