

You Are Never Alone

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[0 : 00] We're going to read from the Old Testament, from the book of first kings. And we'll read the first 18 verses of this chapter. So when we come into this chapter, Elijah has just confronted the prophets of Baal at the top of Mount Carmel, and God has come down in the fire.

And then we pick up just at the end of that story here in chapter 19. 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 more also if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.

Then he was afraid. And he arose and he ran for his life and he came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and he came and sat down under a broom tree.

And he asked that he might die saying, It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.

[1 : 12] And he lay down and he slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, Arise and eat. And he looked and behold there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again.

And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, Arise and eat for the journey is too great for you. And he arose and he ate and drank and went in the strength of that food 40 days and 40 nights to the mount of God.

There he came to a cave and lodged in it and behold the word of the Lord came to him and he said to him, What are you doing here Elijah? He said, I've been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts.

For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant. They've thrown down your altars and and killed your prophets with the sword and I even I only am left and they seek my life to take it away. And he said go out and stand on the mount before the Lord and behold the Lord passed by and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broken pieces the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind.

[2 : 37] And after the wind and 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 the sound of a low whisper and when Elijah heard it he wrapped his face and his cloak and he went out and he stood at the entrance of the cave and behold there came a voice to him and said, What are you doing here Elijah?

He said, I've been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, killed your prophets with the sword. And I even I only am left and they seek my life to take it away.

And the Lord said to him, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria.

And Jehu the son of Nimshi, you shall anoint to be king over Israel. You shall anoint to be king over Israel. And Elijah the son of Shaphat of Abel Meullah.

You shall anoint to be prophet in your place. And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death. And the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elijah put to death.

[3 : 50] Yet I will leave 7000 in Israel all the knees that have not bowed to bell in every mouth that has not kissed him. This is God's holy word.

So tonight we are we're following on from where we ended last week with Elijah showing the people of God who the true God really is.

He has sent down fire and burnt up the sacrifice. He has sent rain to end a three-year long famine. Ahab has come down off the mountain. He is going home to his town or his city Jezreel. And Elijah is out running in front of him. Just as we are meant to think, the king is beginning to let God's word do the leading. From what we read last week in chapter 18 to now at last the people of Israel are going to trust in the true God. The king will return to him. The king and the prophet will work together, will live together at last. And then we get to this chapter tonight, chapter 19.

[4 : 59] And it doesn't go that way at all. Ahab comes home, goes to his wife Jezebel, tells her everything that's happened. She says as far as she can help it, this man Elijah is going to be dead by this time tomorrow.

There is no way that these people are going to come home worshipping another God. There is no way her husband is going to come back and listening to this foreign prophet calling the shots. So as far as she can help it, Elijah will be dead by this time tomorrow. Just to point out one word before we look at this chapter properly.

It's in verse 3, it says that Elijah was afraid because of this. And the word that's used there, it is debated but most likely the word that is really used there is a word which means he saw. Not that he was afraid but that he saw.

Jezebel threatens to have him killed and it says he saw. And what Elijah saw was not the threat to his own life. But what he saw was the fact that God is still not going to be worshiped in Israel.

[6 : 12] The people have seen on top of the mountain God sending fire to burn up the sacrifice. Ahab has seen the rain come down. The true God has sent it at last but they get home and nothing changes.

Jezebel won't have it. There's no change in Israel. That's what Elijah saw. And in his upset, in his heartache, he leaves and heads over 100 miles south.

In one sense, Elijah's heartache that we read off in this chapter, it's down to the fact that the true God is not going to be worshiped. There is going to be no change in Israel.

In a wider sense, in another sense, his heartache is down to the fact that not long ago, life was how it was meant to be. He was on top of the mountain.

Everyone saw who the true God really was. Life was what he wanted it to be. And yet in no time at all, he comes down and he's driven away and he's left asking, how could things go so wrong?

[7 : 19] Life was how he had dreamed it would be and now he's brought so low that he is wanting to be worshiped. So low that he is wanting to die. Just two points tonight.

What is clear in this chapter is that whether you are on the mountaintop or whether you are in the wilderness, you're in the valley, whether you're in either of those places, what is clear in chapter 19 is that God will not leave you on your own.

Whether things are as good as they have ever been or whether you're feeling like your sadness is just growing and growing. Whether work on a Monday to Friday is just how you want it.

Whether your relationships with your family and friends match your ideal. Whether everything in life has its place or it did have its place and it no longer has its place. And you've been left wondering why it's not like that tonight.

God tells you in all of those places you're not alone. Two ways tonight in this chapter, two ways in chapter 19 which God tells you that you're not alone today.

[8 : 32] In verses 4 to 13, God provides everything that you need and he provides for all that you are, every aspect of your being.

And then from verses 15 to 18, secondly, he gives you a community or he puts you into a community. So from verse 4, God provides everything you need for all that you are.

Elijah has left Ege Israel, he's gone a hundred miles south to Bershiba and then from there he's gone another day into the wilderness and it's when he enters into the wilderness that he asks God to take his life.

Elijah isn't fed up here. He's not afraid of Jezebel or Ahab but once again there is going to be no change in Israel and he thinks what hope is there?

What is the point in living when everything goes against you? Look at how God answers that question for Elijah. He wants to die and God says here is some food and water that's going to keep you alive for the next 40 days.

[9 : 47] God prepares a meal for him. God himself makes Elijah a meal and he tells him to come to the table and eat. This is how God begins to provide for Elijah for his physical well-being.

He gives him food and so he is physically sustained. And when you read these verses and when you see Elijah eating and sleeping, God gives him that.

God gives him this food and he gives him this water and he gives him rest because Elijah is a physical person living in a physical world and he has physical needs and interests and at this moment after these days of traveling Elijah needs food and he needs water and so God makes him a cake.

You know it's like I was thinking earlier this week when I was reading this it's kind of like well for me anyway when I'm at home I'm lying in bed on a Saturday morning and I can smell the bacon being cooked and I think today is going to be okay because the bacon is being cooked.

For Elijah the day is not going to be okay. If there is going to be another day it won't be all right but he wakes up and the food has been prepared and the water that is there for him to drink and you know when he wakes up to that it proves to him that God cares for every aspect of his being and he prepares for him physically.

[11 : 13] We understand heartache in different ways each of us and maybe you know what it means to deal with heartbreak or heartache or sadness or upset. Maybe you know what it means to lose someone that you love and maybe you know what it means to miss out on the job that you were so sure that you wanted or so sure that you were getting you might know what it means to be so uncertain about your future and where you are meant to be and yet it all goes wrong. Maybe we have expectations of people and yet we are devastated when these expectations aren't met.

All these things and far more brings heartache. God looks at us and he sees us the same way he saw Elijah. We are physical people in a physical world and God cares about us and he cares about his creation and we are giving things here to enjoy. We are giving things here that will at least in some part give us comfort. You think we've got loads of examples. You think of good foods. You think of music that you like. You think about books that you can hide in, cafes you can sit in. You think of disappearing out of the city and enjoying walks by the sea. Think of your family and friends who can sit with you. God is a creator and he creates things for us to enjoy and more than that he enjoys it when we are enjoying his creation. All of these things and much more are in no way the final answer to our heartache but in every respect God cares for his people. He says in the middle of your heartache here is how I am going to care for you. Here are the things that will in part at least bring you some relief and some comfort. God cares for you as a physical person in a material world that he has made. What else does he do? Verses 89, Elijah is still on this journey. He goes to Mount

Horeb and when he reaches the mountain God invites him to speak. Elijah with his heartache or some what some diagnose today as depression. He reaches the mountain and God asks him this question, what are you doing here Elijah? Some would say that this is quite an accusative tone that God is using. It is as if Elijah is given up and God is rebuking him. It is far more likely that God is not rebuking Elijah but that he is inviting him to speak. One writer says that this question was put to him so that he would pour out his whole heart to the Lord. God tells you that you are not alone by providing everything that you need. He tells you that you are not alone by inviting you to speak to him. He gives you an invitation to tell him everything that causes you heartache. If God provided for you only physically, if he only gave you things that would make you feel good, then that doesn't fix your pain. That doesn't fix your heartbreak. It might be the start of it but like how God deals with Elijah, he doesn't expect us to store up our pain. He doesn't abucate us and tell us to get on with it. No, he asks us the same question. He says, what are you doing here? Why does he ask that? Why does he come to us with that question?

Peter tells us in his first layer, casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you. He doesn't just care for your physical being but he cares for what some call here your psychological being as well. He cares about how you think and work things out. God knows what the answer is in this chapter. He knows why Elijah has left Jezreel. He knows why you feel the way that you feel when you go to bed at night and when you get up in the morning. But he doesn't expect you to hold and do you speak to him? Do you tell him about your anxieties? If you have sorrow, he wants to hear about it. If you worry, well, this week at school or uni or work is going to look like, he wants to know because he cares for you. He didn't let Elijah travel another 40 days just to tell him how weak he was. No, he asks him and he asks you, what are you doing here?

Cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you. Just one point specifically in this question. And in Elijah's reply, he gives the same answer twice when God asks him this question. He's heartbroken. We've said already that God is not going to be worshipped in Israel.

[16 : 46] He's devastated by this. And twice he says that the people have forsaken your covenant. They have thrown down your altars and killed your prophets. Your covenant, your altars, your prophets. Elijah's heartache is down to the fact that the people want nothing to do with the true God. He saw that nothing was going to change. Belonging to God and trusting in him, it doesn't just bring joy. It does bring joy and it brings joy that you will not find anywhere else in the world, but it doesn't just bring that. It brings sadness with it as well. When you hear in your workplace, or you hear in your social and friend circles, when you hear on the TV, in almost every corner of daily life, when you hear that life is what you make of it and you're the one that sets the rules. And then you see how that works out. What do we do with that?

If you're a Christian, the challenge, I think, is not to spend your week thinking that this is just the way it is. This is just the way this city works. The challenge is to look at Elijah and see someone who is disappointed and who cries out to God because his community is making an idol and a God out of everything apart from God himself. Does it hurt that the only one who truly knows and loves us is the one who's rejected? The one who loves us, the one who has compassion on us, does it hurt when we see how he is the one that is being rejected in the world? The true God completely knows and he completely cares for you. And this God comes to you in his compassion and he asks, what are you doing here? God not only provides for you physically, but he comes to you with an invitation to speak to him. One more point under this heading. God provides for you, provides for all that you are, and most importantly in this chapter, he provides for you spiritually as well. Elijah pours out his heart and God's reply to him is to minister to him by his word.

In verse 11, God tells Elijah to go out on top of the mountain and look out and he sees his huge displays, these huge signs of nature. He sees this wind that's tearing apart the mountains and the rocks. He sees the earthquake, he sees the fire, and then what does it say? God is not in any of these things. And then after that, after all of that passes, you see what comes, the sound of a low whisper or in another translation, a calm, soft voice. And God has been speaking already, we see that. God has been speaking to Elijah already in this chapter, but it's made absolutely clear to him now. Elijah has to cover his face because he realizes that God is going to minister to him. God is going to speak directly into his life, into his very being. God is going to save him from his pain, not by huge signs and wonders, but by the quietness of his word. In John 16, Jesus, he's telling his disciples that when he leaves, the Holy Spirit's going to come and he's going to guide them into all the truth. And in one way, that was a specific promise to the apostles.

In another sense, it's a promise to the church. The Spirit comes today and he guides us into all the truth by applying God's word to our hearts. The Spirit comes and he guides you into all the truth by making God's word alive to you. He ministers to you by illuminating God's word. You know, Paul says in Romans, and Corey prayed it tonight, the Spirit knows what you need far more than you know yourself. And he ministers to you by bringing you the truth. He cares for you by bringing you God's word, by bringing you his promises and making them real in your heart.

That is God's word. You're not great signs, not great displays, but the quietness of his word. And I think today we probably know ourselves that this can be a mundane thing. When we get up in the morning, we probably think there's nothing spectacular about getting up in the morning, sitting in your room, sitting in the lounge and reading the Bible. And yet compared to the winds and the earthquakes and the fires, that is how God has decided to speak to you.

[22 : 19] One example, you might come to God like Elijah has done in this chapter because life isn't what it was last week, last month, last year, even 10 years ago.

You might pour out your heart to him because there is no certainty over what life is going to look like these next few months and years. God answers you in his word. In Exodus 14, he will fight for you. He will take care of your burdens and your pain, and Moses says, take heart, the Lord will fight for you.

God answers you by the quietness of his word. How do you know you're not alone? God doesn't stop at physical comfort. He doesn't stop with an invitation to speak, but he comes to you and he answers your heart taking his word.

God has chosen to speak to you through his word, and the Spirit comes, and the Spirit says, here is the answer that you're looking for. Here are the promises made to the broken hearted.

God promises that he will provide for all that you are. He promises that you're not alone by providing for all that you are. He promises that you're not alone by putting you into a community, by giving you a community. God tells Elijah from verses 15 to 18 that there is going to be judgment, that there will be judgment for these people worshipping Baal, but right at the end of the chapter, he says that there are going to be 7,000 people left in Israel who have not bowed the knee, but who have instead trusted in the true God. God promises Elijah that there will be a community for him when he returns north. In Luke 9, Jesus is going up the mountain with his disciples, and while he's up there, it says that he is transfigured. He changes appearance. They see his glory, and when he's up there, when they see his glory, it says that two people appeared with him, [24 : 54] Moses and Elijah. It says that these three men were talking, and they were talking about Jesus' Exodus. That's the word that's used, his Exodus. You immediately think back to Moses, leading the people out of Egypt away from slavery towards freedom. You think of Moses coming to Mount Sinai, where Elijah is in this chapter, and God tells him that he's going to consecrate a people group who are going to belong to him and who are going to represent him to the nations. When Jesus is up the mountain talking about his Exodus, he's talking about the same thing. Through the sacrifice that he is going to make, a community is going to be created.

A body is going to be formed. A body made up of people who trust in him. What will these people do?

They will worship God, and they will love him. On top of that, they will love one another as well. How do we do that? How do Christians love one another in this community that we've been made a part of? We care for each other and for all that we are. We cook for each other. We make lunch and dinner for one another. We read together. We go on walks together. We help each other with a gardener, with the painting. We care for each other physically. We care for each other's well-being. We come with the same question, what are you doing here? We come ready to hear what is upsetting, what is bringing heartache to those around us. We care for each other spiritually. We pray for one another. More importantly, we point to the one who hears our prayers. We point to Jesus, the one who loves the body, but who loves you individually and cares for you specifically and promises that he will fix your pain. God proves that you're not alone by putting you into a community which reflects his nature. Do we do that? It's the question in chapter 19.

Do we reflect what God is like? Do we reflect his caring nature inside of this community? Do we care for each other's whole being every day? One thing, just to close, if you trust in Jesus, then you are in this community. When Jesus came down, he grew up, he lived, and while he did that, he lost all sense of community.

[27 : 54] He lost every friend that he had. He spent the last three years of his life being hated or mocked or accused. He spent the last few days of his life being rejected by his own disciples. Peter even goes to the point of saying he never knew this man. As Jesus has put on the cross, he is there alone. As he dies, as he hangs on the cross, he is there without a friend, and he does it, or he did it so that God could turn to you in grace and save you. The one who died alone has made it so that you will never have to be alone. God provides for all that you are, and he gives you a community because Christ already came, and he willingly gave it all up for you. If you haven't trusted in him, if you haven't believed that he is the only true God, and you are letting your circumstances and your people determine how you live and how you feel, and then you come to heartache or you come to upset, you have to face that heartache alone. You have to face that without God's word and without a community which shows you what he is like. If you trust in him, if you put your trust in Jesus, if you confess that he is really the true God, then you will be brought into a family that knows the answer. You'll be brought into the care of one who promises that he will answer all your pain and all your worry by his word. However the next few days look, however they look to you, Christ suffered alone so that this week you would not have to.

You're not alone, but you're part of a body, and the head of this body is God who promises to care for you and answer your upset in the quietness of his word. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for this chapter. We thank you for what we see in Elijah's life, and we pray that we will be people who understand that we are in the care of one who provides for our whole being, who cares for us physically, psychologically, who answers us spiritually by his word.

Help us to reflect your nature. Help us to be a community that does the same for one another, until we get to be with you and all our heartache, all our tears are removed. So be well as we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.