

Tired, Not Alone

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[0 : 0 0] So for just a few minutes this evening I want to look back, it's just a one-off sermon this evening it's not part of a series as we come to the end of the year but I want to look at this passage in 1 Kings on page 301, 1 Kings chapter 19 and it's a really interesting chapter, it's a really interesting story and I think it's relevant, the principles of the way God interacts and deals with Elijah are I hope instructive and encouraging for us because I think sometimes when we come to this time of year to put it bluntly we're knackered we're absolutely exhausted and we can be really tired spiritually, we can be, like it's not a great time of year physically because there's so many bugs and illnesses going around and we've been working in our lives and in the church really hard and there's just that sense that the darkness comes in and the darkness is around us and it brings a sense of tiredness and weirdness and our situations may be very different from Elijah's experience here but I think the way God deals with him is very instructive and I hope encouraging for us and a reminder to us of the kind of God we have and also the kind of faith that we look to have in our lives

Corey this morning and often when he preaches mentions the various commentators the various writers that have been writing about the passage that we're studying many of the commentators, many of the writers in this passage are very harsh on Elijah they're very quick to judge his situation and I would like to take a slightly different opinion to that this evening I think he's often regarded as someone who is running away or escaping and lacking faith you know he's done an amazing thing as the prophet before the prophets of Baal and before Ahab and Jezebel and he's been strong and mighty and then all of a sudden when he hears of Jezebel's response he scurries, it runs away and it seems so faithless and it says well why hasn't he just kept the faith he had in the previous story and really gone on and people are quick to judge him as being escapist and faithless but I don't think that's the case in this story there's no doubt that Elijah was broken and he was a broken man in this story and we're going to just unpack that for a little minute and then also look at the way God was dealing with him because after what had happened you know that God had sent fire from heaven and had licked up all the water that was around the altar and had set the sacrifice on fire and there was clear evidence that he had answered prayer and that God was the living God and that the prophets of Baal were worshiping a dead, useless idol but Jezebel was not willing to respond to that evidence of the living God in verse 3 we have these words when Jezebel, or verse 2, 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 a life of one of them by tomorrow she just wasn't interested in what had happened and she just wanted to destroy Elijah as a representative of God she was determined in her unbelief and her opposition and she simply could not accept what God had revealed as being evidence of his living power and reality and so she wanted to destroy God's representative Elijah

God's anointed Elijah so he ran from that appointment he left the room he didn't want to be exposed before Jezebel and his life to be taken and seemingly for the powers of unbelief and idolatry to have victory over God but there's no doubt he was in despair he went, her told in verse 4 in Sandor a broom tree and there he asked that he might die saying it is enough now Lord take away my life or I'm no better than my fathers there was this great sense of failure at one level Jezebel and Dehab hadn't turned to worship the living God and he was exhausted obviously by these efforts and gutted that the victory that was there and if you have time go back and read chapter 18 had been so temporary and didn't seem to have the effect that he believed it was going to have and so therefore he was in despair and he was exhausted and he was broken but he also couldn't see the whole picture now that's always our condition also and we'll remember that as we go on but he simply couldn't see the whole picture

God asks him twice later on what are you doing here Elijah and Elijah twice explains the situation as he sees it I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts for the people of Israel, for sacking your covenant, throwing down your altars killed your prophets with the sword and I, even I only am left and they seek to take my life away also that was his summary of the situation that was what he saw was happening and he thought the covenant that God had made with his people was done was finished and he was running back for whatever reason he was going to run back to Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai that place where the covenant was made and he wanted to go there tell God his complaint and say this is the end, it's all done, it's finished so we have this guy in dire straits and exhausted and drained and feeling that really it's spiritually all over for him how did God respond to Elijah in this story we see certain things that God does and I'll go on to apply them I think into our own lives as well how did God respond?

well God gave him sleep in verse 5, he laid down and slept under a broom tree and behold an angel touched him and said to him, arise and eat God gave him sleep, God let him sleep he was clearly exhausted physically by the efforts of these last years and months and days and God gave him sleep it was affecting his perspective you know what it's like, I know what it's like we can't sleep, everything just seems out of place and everything seems to be wrong with the world God gave him sleep God sent him an angel God sent him an angel who would comfort him and who would give him food and would encourage him behold an angel touched him and said to him, arise and eat and behold there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water he ate and drank and lay down again the angel touched him and encouraging to give him that touch and he was given great assurance by that heavenly companion at that moment at that time, huge encouragement

[8 : 27] God went on to strengthen him for the journey, arise and eat for the journey is too great for you God didn't say, stop running go back he said, you're on a journey you're going that way Jezebel's that way keep on going that way and be strengthened for the journey I know you have to do this and I know you're going to the right place I know you're heading for my covenant mountain know that as you go there I'm with you and you're not alone and then when he gets to this place, this mountain that he goes to Mount Horib then we see God communicating and speaking with Elijah and reasoning with him so we have this question he came to the cave when he arrived at Horib and he lodged there and the word of the Lord came to him and said what are you doing here Elijah?

now you could take that question in two ways you could take that in a kind of accusatory way what on earth are you doing here Elijah?

or you could take it as I believe you ought to take it as God giving Elijah the opportunity to speak Elijah, why have you come here? what are you doing here?

what's the reason for you coming here? it was an invitation from God for Elijah to pour out his heart to speak with God and to tell God what was the situation that he felt the difficulty in the battles that he was facing it wasn't a word of reproof it wasn't condemnation he was giving Elijah the opportunity to state his case against Israel and unburden his soul and twice he does that twice Elijah responds and says absolutely the right thing he says exactly what he's...

at one level he's accurate he doesn't know the whole story but the story he does have at some levels is accurate because there is a case in which the people had forsaken God and the covenant of God and from that comes that very famous section where God asks Elijah to come to the front of the cave and God passes by and there's a great power in the wind and in the earthquake and in the fire and he's not in any of these things but then God speaks to him in a still low whisper and asks him the question again and God is demonstrating to him and speaking to him and revealing himself to Elijah and reminding Elijah that there may be powerful demonstrations of God's power as there was in the previous chapter on Mount Carmel but ultimately God is the God who doesn't ordinarily work in this way but he works through his word and he works through communication with his people and he speaks to Elijah and reminds Elijah that in the turmoil of these days and in the upheaval of fire and earthquake and wind which seems to disrupt everything and seems to turn everything upside down and God's gentle will, his powerful and changing will is still being done, he is still moving his purposes forward and he still has his sovereign will being outworked and God then shows Elijah the whole picture

[12 : 36] God says, yes, Elijah you are right that people have rebelled and turned against my word and he reveals his judgment and he reveals his grace through this relationship, through this communication through this gentle word and he says, yes, I still got work for you to do I still got things I want you to do go back, return by the way of the wilderness to Damascus anoint a new king and anoint a new prophet to follow from you and they will bring judgment on the covenant breakers because if you remember the covenant at Sinai between God and Moses was a covenant of grace but it was a covenant which spelled out for those who disobeyed that there would be curses and for those who obeyed there would be blessings and here is it being outworked and he also reminds Elijah that there is a tremendously strong remnant of 7000 who have not bowed any who are still part of God's kingdom for whom the gates of hell will not prevail and that despite these dark days

God is gently saying, I am still victorious my purposes are still being worked out and I still have work for you to do so it's a great account of God working in the life of Elijah when he is at his wit's end when he is drained and exhausted and he feels God's covenant is no longer at work when secular world, idolatrous world has won the day despite all his efforts in God's kingdom and in God's cause and God reveals otherwise Now I just want to apply this chapter and I am going to do so tightly but then also quite broadly and broaden it beyond the perimeters of this particular passage What lessons can we learn?

What are some of the lessons? There are many things but like Cori this morning there are lots of things here we will only pick out one or two What are some of the things that we can take from this chapter? One of them is in our lives and it's an important thing to remember a hugely important thing to remember in our Christian lives especially when we are discouraged and especially when we are discouraged by our friends who are not becoming Christians no matter what we would love to see and we wonder if God would simply do more miracles so that people will become believers and see his power and see his glory Can I just say miracles aren't enough?

Miracles aren't enough and again I will maybe just plug into a little bit what Cori was saying this morning it's not drama that we need, it's surgery Cori spoke this morning about the surgeon's knife that God when he works in our lives he works in our heart and he changes our heart and what we need is we need God in our hearts and in the hearts around us we need God to work in our hearts and therefore part of our task is not to be discouraged but to go back to God to ask him continually to be working in people's hearts so that drama and miracle isn't the answer but prayer to the living God and the recognition of the darkness and blackness of people's hearts will drive us to that I've got a tremendous quote from one of the commentators who is more sympathetic with Elijah and it's when he speaks about the limited limitations of evidence and sometimes the frustration of revelation just because, Ralph Davis is the writer just because there's been clear proof on Carmel that's the previous miracle chapter 18 doesn't mean Jezebel will receive that proof or that such clear evidence will change her one can imagine the semi-apocryphal scene

Ahab, her husband, the king, mildly protests but Jezebel, honey, when Elijah prayed to Yahweh fire came down and slurped up everything right there in front of our eyeballs the queen glares through mascara-laden lashes at Ahab and with that familiar derisive turn of Revlon tended lips retorts so this response surprises us even if we have swallowed the education fallacy that pervades our culture and governments i.e. get people the right information and it will change them but it doesn't sometimes Christians slip into thinking that if we only get the truth to people or press upon them our most rigorous and cogent arguments then but like Jezebel, be your teacher about what the human heart is like there was a blaze of light on Mount Carmel but unless Yahweh grants internal light to see the external light the darkness remains

[18:08] Yahweh's fire consumed everything except the blindness in Jezebel's mind and the recalcitrance in her will John 3:19 and this is the judgment that the light has come into the world and men love darkness rather than the light this realisation must temper all our expectations in our evangelism, in our counselling and in our preaching because that drives us to prayer our best efforts, our sweetest words our most powerful arguments our greatest miracles that we could be channels of God using can only ever be part of the story because the darkness of the human heart and because people loving darkness rather than the light we are driven to recognise the need for praying and praying that God will work and God will change and God will act in people's hearts so miracles aren't enough but also we see that God understands

God understands what we're like well he made us, you know, that's the most important thing isn't it he understands, somebody says God you don't understand me but of course he understands us because he made us and he knows us intimately he knows every single one of us and he knows us in a way that no one else knows us and he knows exactly what we need and so we recognise that God will deal with us as we go to him, he will deal with us according to our needs as he did with Elijah here so he will do with us especially in our battles and in our struggles and in our depression and in our fear and in our longings and weakness God understands our struggles Zeph 3:17, the Lord your God is with you the mighty warrior who saves, he will take great delight in you in his love you will, he will no longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing

Isaiah 30, 18, yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you therefore he will rise to show you compassion he knows and he moves towards us and he rises to show us compassion and he encourages us with sometimes the simplest of things here he sends his angel and his angel brings rest, food, drink, rest, food and drink that's all, no lecture, no sermon, no nice shiny new book tells you 7 ways to be a great believer just rest, just sleep and just food that's great he knows exactly what we need and he knows that our greatest need within that, parallel to that is the freedom to talk with him the freedom to speak to him the freedom to be heard you know there's nothing more significant than someone of great importance saying I'm willing to listen, I'm willing to hear speak to me, tell me your complaints, tell me your concerns and so he sends those alongside, angels alongside to help and to administer and to encourage now I want to slightly go into a little side road here because we might not be angels

I sincerely believe in angels and I believe angels are working on behalf of believers today Hebrews 1.14 are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation, I believe that but I also believe just as God has angels to do His bidding we are His body, you and I we are the friends of angels, okay we are the people who He often uses to answer the prayers of His people so I think it's very important for us as believers not simply when we see the brokenness and the hurt and the weakness of others not simply because I think we can use this as an excuse not simply to say I'm praying for you because ultimately that can be quite a cheap thing to say it doesn't cost a lot, it doesn't take a lot of time it doesn't take a lot of effort in many ways and it can I think betray an attitude that says

I'll pray for you, I'm just handing you over to God I'm kind of busy today, I'll pray for you but I'm busy I've got lots to do, so I'm just handing over to God I'll pray for you and you go on your way and we can do that, I think we can I'm not saying we do but I think we can sometimes misunderstand prayer in that way where we say that's all God requires of me it's simply just to pray for one another but I think often we are the answers to our own prayers and God wants to use us in answer to our prayers for one another, He wants us to be His ministering spirits He wants us to be His angels He wants us to bring water, food, company, encouragement to one another, that's what He wants of us that's His will, God understands us and He understands that we need one another and that that is a powerful and meaningful way that we are to express our grace and to express our understanding it's a tremendous picture that we have there

[24 : 31] God understands and He gives us what we need as we look to Him and He often will use each of us in that and He gives us the encouragement to look out and to be ready, here in my Lord, send me but I think it speaks also, briefly we're nearly finished of the reality of spiritual burdens Elijah here, he's quite often accused of being self-pitying look at me, everyone's left and I'm the only one left God, you know, I've pity on me as if he's feeling kind of self-pitying about his condition but Elijah shows both in what he says and in the journey he takes back to Mount Sinai that he is concerned about the covenant and he's concerned about God's promises and he's concerned about the brokenness of the people who have turned against God, God's own people who have spurned his love and who have spurned his grace and who have chosen not to worship God, the living God but idols and the deadness of these idols and he cares about them and he cares his burdens and his depression and his brokenness is God-centered because he cares about what is happening and these spiritual burdens we will bear often and they are significant for us or maybe we don't do we care about the infidelity in the church or the doctrinal indifference or when God's name and God's purity is trampled over in the lives of believers or those who claim to be believers

Elijah was depressed and he was despondent but it wasn't about himself, it was about God's name and God's honour and if you're down tonight and if you're discouraged and if you're discouraged because it's a spiritual discouragement because you weep over the indifference and the careless lives of friends the blasphemy and the idolatry around you and wondering how we can see the people we're praying for turn to Christ then that's a good burden to bear and take that to God take it to Him and plead it before Him because God reminds us God will teach us and remind us that He is working in both in judgment and in grace through His Word and through His promises the Bible, it reminds us again and again that God is, His kingdom is coming and He is faithful to His Word and to His promises drama might enthuse us but God is doing the invisible work of changing hearts turning people from darkness to life and generally I think the growth of God's kingdom will not be by headline and not be by dramatic personalities but will be by the grace of God at work in your and my very ordinary lives and making miracles happen through that through us being faithful and committed and loyal and true to His Word as I believe Elijah was and let's be encouraged that God does have His people just as He had here

He has His people He's building His church none who are to be saved will not be brought into the kingdom we believe He has many people in the city and we're encouraged not to be downcast, not to give up to look to Him to take our time in this period if we're feeling physically drained and dry to rest, to eat, to drink to rest, to eat, to drink to talk to God use the time that we have to talk to God remember that He has His church and He will build His church and the gates of hell will not overcome it and we belong to that great work that is coming to its conclusion so use this time to recuperate renew your spiritual energy and rest and come to Him and communicate with Him and let Him communicate with you gently and yet powerfully in the way He does best let's put our heads in prayer

Father God we ask in prayer that you would teach us from your word that you would remind us who you are you're often just through your word revealed so different from what we think and you were different to what Elijah was expecting you were different to David expected you were different to what Mary your mother expected, Simeon, the disciples the New Testament church we are always as we come to you and as we seek you we come to be amazed we come to be able to worship we come in awe we come because our A to Z answers of who God is are blown apart by your character infinite, eternal and unchangeable character and we will find constantly as we come to you unbelievable surprises and great truth and a word that is solid a word that communicates to us truth and absolute reality and sure and certain will so enable us to soak in your word not in some kind of intellectual or merely knowledgeable way but in a way that interacts with you Jesus as the word incarnate and that understands communication with you relationship with you through your finished work in the cross

Lord grant us that remarkable spiritual strength grant us the help and the guidance and the commitment that comes from looking to you and being refreshed by you and remind us that we too are commissioned by you even in our tiredness as we take rest knowing the work can go on without us as we take rest we can be recommissioned and re-energized to go on to serve you because we have the power of the infinite God who will keep us for the few short years we are here until he takes us home remind us of these great things and encourage us this evening we pray in Jesus' name Amen