

Sermon 22 June 2025

I tend to overly idolise the heroic men and women described in the scriptures; but the Bible is not a story or some idealised version of events.

The bible is the word of truth and it describes people and circumstances, wonders, warts and wrinkles.

Have you noticed that the heroes of faith, the leaders in scripture, also come with all their human feelings and failings.

Yet still somehow they know how to find their way out of what John Bunyan called, in the Pilgrims Progress, the “Slough of Despond” and get back on track with the Lord.

Elijah is one such man.

Clearly a prophet of God empowered by God who did great things in the name of the Lord, but a man who also fell short more than once.

To summarise the story from chapter 19 of 1Kings...

- Elijah has been part of a large display of Gods power.
- The false prophets and priest of Baal have been vanquished.
- In front of many of the followers of Baal.
- Finally Elijah surrenders to fear and runs far, far, away.

Physically exhausted he had lost his appetite literally as well as spiritually.

Only I am left!

His own words to God tell us that he was depressed about his work and he was descending to self pity.

This is typical of someone who has concluded that they have failed in their mission and it was time to quit.

This great prophet clearly feels alone and without hope.

- Here is a textbook case of burnout.
- But the Lord didn't see it that way.

Our moods. Our feelings. Our interpretation of the circumstances.

These do not affect the way God sees things one teeny tiny bit.

The Lord sees beyond our self-pity and discouragement and weariness. As this story tells us,

- God lovingly, gently, and tenderly calls to us in our despair,
- when we feel like giving up the most and reminds us that we are not alone.

The other thing that encourages me about this story is that Elijah uses exactly the same tactics that any of us might be tempted to use with the Lord.

- The yes but...
- Or well I thought...
- Or the excuses that starts with he / she / they...
- I offer in defence of my actions.

I see them all here with Elijah.

I confess to having used them myself.

When the torrential rains began to fall on Mt Carmel, Jezebel may have thought that Baal the storm God had triumphed.

I can just imagine her fury when Ahab, a frightened, timid, man, arrives home to tell her of Elijah's success and the total failure of Baal.

By Jezebel is no fool. Elijah is now a popular man a prophet of renown. It wouldn't be wise to send her soldiers to kill him and make him a martyr. Instead, she threatens him and thus succeeds in frightening him.

Elijah knowing that Jezebel is the power behind the throne, even after such a great and clearly God driven success, responds to her threats in a completely human way.

He RUNS!

Charles Spurgeon said that Elijah retreated before a beaten enemy.

But Why? Why is Elijah walking by sight and not by faith?

For the previous three years, scripture tells us that Elijah didn't make a single move without hearing from God and obeying God.

It was really extraordinary period of provision and protection and one letter from a defeated Queen sends him running.

Have you noticed that when people of faith fail It is almost always associated with their greatest godly strength.

- Abraham (a man of great faith) fled to Egypt where he failed in his faith.
- David's (known as someone after God's own heart) failed in his integrity.
- Moses whose strength was his humility and meekness was undone by his anger.
- Peter a man of courage boldness was deserted by these very things around the fire after the last supper.

Elijah was experiencing a profound sense of failure which led to his self-pity and lack of faith.

- Perhaps his own expectations of how God would behave were not fulfilled.
- Perhaps he expected Ahab and Jezebel to repent and return to Jehovah.
- Perhaps he was expecting some instant revival throughout the whole land.

But whatever Elijah's expectations were, the Lord rarely allows us his servants to see the big picture or all the good that will come from their obedience.

Eventually the Lord would reveal to Elijah that there were 7000 people in Israel who had not bowed to Baal and had not worshipped the false God.

There is every reason to think that Elijah's own ministry had influenced many of them. But it is really sad to me that God has to use this information as a way of restoring Elijah to faith

- rather than a reward for his trust and obedience.

When the Lord finally came and spoke to Elijah in the cave it wasn't to rebuke him or to instruct him but ask him a simple question:

Elijah, what are you doing here?

In his reply Elijah tells the Lord about what he's done and what's happened to him as if the Lord doesn't know these things.

He expresses his feeling of being alone in this work. He is so depressed he asks God to take his life.

Did you notice how God sets about restoring Elijah?

None of the dramatic displays of power from God the earthquake, the fire, the storm, were enough to stir Elijah.

But in the still small voice the prophet stepped out of the Cave to meet with the Lord.

After all that happened on Mount Carmel and all that it brought him to where he is Elijah still understood that

- most of God's work is done with a small voice
- to a listening ear and heart and
- not through great and tumultuous acts of power.

The Church of today is often involved with mammoth meetings, loud music, high pressure promotions, and yet I believe that God still seeks to reach the world through the ministry of “earthen vessels”

- Crackpots if you like, such as you and I.

Just as Elijah found strength in God's still, small voice, discouraged Christians can find strength in God's presence and grace, even amidst challenges.

Galatians 3 reminds us that our relationship with God is based on faith, not on our ability to perfectly keep the law or to be part of great acts of power.

This faith allows us to persevere in the face of adversity, knowing that God's grace is sufficient.

Not by power not by might but by my spirit says the Lord.

- When God wanted to start the Jewish nation God sent a baby Isaac.
- When God wanted to deliver that nation from enslavement he sent another baby Moses.
- He sent a teenager named David to kill a giant.
- And when it was time to redeem the world he sent another baby his son Jesus.

Whether it is after success or a lack of it, we are much better served when we seek to find encouragement and strength in God's presence,

- Listening to His quiet voice

- to live by faith, and to persevere in the service to God,
- regardless of the challenges we may face.

*Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.*

*My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.*

*Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts;
all your waves and your billows have gone over me.
By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.*

...

*Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.*

(Psalm 42:5-8, 11)