

Sunday 9th October 22

In Prayer and on the Run

1 Kings 18:41-46

⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." ⁴² So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

⁴³ "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked.

"There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."

⁴⁴ The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So, Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'" ⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. ⁴⁶ The power of the LORD came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

James 5:13-20

The Prayer of Faith

¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. ¹⁷ Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Sermon: In Prayer and on the run

[Please have your Bibles opened at 1 Kings chapter 18 – starting at verse 41– let me pray before we begin]

Intro

Prayer is a tricky business – isn't it?

Sometimes I get people say to me:

“Why bother praying, God already knows everything and knows what is going to happen?”

Or they say:

“I've be praying for a member of my family for years – God hasn't answered”

Or they say:

“I prayed for my family member to get better and they died”

(pause)

I'm sure we've **all heard these sorts of questions/comments** or even said them ourselves.

Hopefully, this passage from 1 Kings 18 which shows us God's dealings with His prophet **Elijah will give us answers to these questions...**

Before we look at this week's passage though - let's get the **context** from last week.

Context

Last week - God told Elijah that God Himself would **soon break the drought** that He instigated in chapter 17 (because of King **Ahab** and Queen **Jezebel's disobedience of God and worship of the false god Baal and false goddess Asherah**).

God couldn't simply break the drought by sending rain, otherwise the **people** of Israel **would think that Baal had finally answered their prayers** and sent rain.

So, **Elijah** God's prophet, through God's power, **challenged the 450 false prophets of Baal to a God contest**. They would prepare a bull to be sacrificed and call upon Baal to consume the sacrifice with fire; and Elijah would also prepare bull to be sacrificed and call upon the Lord God, YHWH, of Israel. **Whichever god consumed the sacrifice with fire was the real God**. Elijah even made his sacrifice more difficult by drenching it with heaps of water. The false prophets of Baal cried out all day to their false god, Baal and nothing happened. Elijah taunted them that their god was perhaps too busy or even asleep or travelling! Whereas Elijah cried out to the Lord God and his sacrifice was consumed by fire instantly. **The people realized YHWH was the Real God and Baal was totally discredited**. Elijah had the **false prophets killed** as punishment for their apostasy (as per Deuteronomy 13). Now the **rain can come...**

But not straight away – **Elijah may have to pray first...**

Intro

There are **2 Sections** in our passage this morning:

Elijah's Prayer (vv41-45a)

and **Elijah's Run** (vv45b-46)



Elijah's Prayer (vv41-45a)

1st then – let's look at **Elijah's prayer** – picking up from verse 41

Elijah is still **calling the shots** on **Mount Carmel**.

V41 – **Elijah** commands King **Ahab** to “*go and eat and drink*” and the King goes (v42)
Meanwhile **Elijah** went up to the **top of Mount Carmel** crouched down to the ground,
 put his **face between his knees** (v42b) and **prayed**.

The verse doesn't say Elijah is praying – but **that's what he is doing**.

It's a **posture of intense, concentrated prayer**

What can we learn from Elijah's prayer?

[Slide 1-Heading]

In Humble Faith

[Slide 1A – Humble Faith]

First - prayer must be: **In humble faith!**

We can be tricked into thinking **Elijah is a Baal-busting super prophet** after last week
 and that God will bless anything Elijah touches but here, we see, **Elijah humble himself
 to beg for the Lord God's help**.

But if we **cast our minds back to the past few weeks** and chapters 17 and 18 – we
should recall - **Elijah** has been **reduced** to the **helplessness of humble prayer** on more
 than one occasion.

Back in 17:20-21 Elijah **prayed for the life of the widow's son**

And in 18:36-37 Elijah **prayed for fire to come down and take his sacrifice** and discredit
 the false god Baal.

Elijah has no power to produce any of this – it's God's power.

What we are meant to see is - **Elijah is NOT the super-prophet** who produces some
 magic trick and has an ace up his sleeve.

No **Elijah can only confess his helplessness in each situation and come to the Lord God
 in humble faith and pray**.

Application: For us it means - **prayer is the most humiliating work**. We have to **admit that we can't always fix or change things** – and we have to **humble ourselves and pray** to the ONE who can do all things.

(pause)

According to God's Will

[Slide 2b-will]

Second - prayer must be: **according to God's will**

If we look at v41 – Elijah seems so sure rain is on its way. He **tells King Ahab to go and get his supper** because there is the sound of heavy rain – but in actual fact the rain is barely on its way.

Is **Elijah** being **presumptuous**? Even **hasty**?

If he is so certain rain is coming, why does he pray for it in v42?

(pause)

We can be sure that **Elijah is sure**.

He would have **general confidence** on the basis of a prayer – **King Solomon prayed** back in **1 Kings 8:35-36** at the **Dedication of the Temple**. In that prayer **Solomon prayed** that God would shut up the heavens and there would be no rain on the land, if the people sinned – and that God would send rain on the land – when the people repented of their sin and rebellion against God.

So, **Elijah** can have **general confidence** from Solomon's prayer.

But Elijah also has a **specific promise** from God in **verse 1 of chapter 18** where God said:

"I will send rain on the land"

So what **Elijah** is doing in verse 42 is **praying for God's promise to now be fulfilled**.

So, the **principle in action** here is an important one – and it's how God works:

God wills to send rain – and **God wills** that His will comes to pass through **Elijah's prayer**.

Application: For us – **that’s why we need to pray**. The principle for us is: God’s will is certain, but He delights to do His will in answer to the prayers of His people. The **prayers of His people** constitute the appointed channel by which God works His will. He is **not limited to this channel** but we might say, He prefers it.

The Bible has **lots of examples** of this principle.

Ezekiel 36:37-38 for example says:

³⁷ “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Once again I will yield to Israel’s plea and do this for them: I will make their people as numerous as sheep, ³⁸ as numerous as the flocks for offerings at Jerusalem during her appointed festivals. So will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

Here **God promises a population explosion** in Jerusalem but how does it happen? **By God yielding to the plea (prayers) of Israel**.

Another example in **Revelation 22:20**

Jesus promises: *“Yes, I am coming soon”*. And immediately following that is the prayer *“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus”*

This same principle is in play here with Elijah – **God promises rain in v1** – and in v42 **Elijah prays it down**.

Application: Doesn’t **God’s modus operandi** give dignity to prayer? We take His promises and turn them into prayers in order that the promises may come to pass.

What honour God gives us – He hasn’t made us robots – but has made us His servants – who should have **no higher ambition than to pray down His will!**

Isn’t that what we pray in the **Lord’s prayer**? *“Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done”*.

(pause)

Yet there is also a mystery to prayer.

Last week – when **Elijah prayed for the fire** to come down and take his sacrifice – **God answered immediately** and **discredited the false god Baal**.

But this week in verses 43 and 44 – **Elijah’s prayer is agonising** – he sends his servant 6 times to go and check if the rain is coming – and **six times the servant returns and says “*there is nothing there*”**. The **suspense is killing Elijah!**

Then the **seventh time** – **God answers** and the **rain comes**.

So how come God answered straight away last week and this week seems to put Elijah through the mill? And even next week we will see **Elijah prays that he would die (19:4)** and **God refuses to answer that prayer all together** because it’s not His will!

Ultimately – we cannot know the mind of God. We must simply **live with the mystery**. That **doesn’t mean we shouldn’t pray though** - as that is God’s channel for us to communicate with Him and for His will to be done.

But we can’t write God’s script for Him and we can’t assume that He provides a “one-size fits all” way of answering prayers or assume that He requires us to have “a certain amount of faith” or assume that He works in a particular human designed pattern.

God is not that dull! Sometimes **prayer** is relatively **effortless** (like the prayer for fire) and other times extremely **agonising** (like the prayer for rain). It’s a **mystery** – *God’s ways are not our ways* (Isaiah 55:8) and *who knows the mind of God fully?* (1 Cor 2:11)

Just **one word of caution: we are to pray according to God’s will**. Sometimes it’s **obvious** what God’s will is – because it’s a promise in scripture – other times – we’re praying for something and we’re not sure if it’s God’s will. Like praying for a new house – new job –for a major trial or problem in your life to go away.

A couple of general principles we can say:

- 1st - Sometimes – God can answer **by removing the problem we're praying about** and sometimes **God can answer by not removing the problem but by giving us the strength to get through the problem**
- 2nd - Sometimes God says **Yes** – sometimes **No** – and other times **WAIT**.

Requires Perseverance

[Slide 1c-perseverance]

Which leads us on to the **third point** - prayer: **requires perseverance**

As we said – Elijah prayed for rain and **six times his servant came back with the news of no rain in sight.**

Elijah didn't give up – God had promised rain – and Elijah rightly had faith in God's promise – and **persevered in prayer.**

Genuine faith can wait for God.

George Muller persevered in **prayer for 63 years for a friend to become a Christian** – that **friend finally gave his heart to Jesus at George's funeral!**

I prayed for 15 years or more for my daughter Jennifer to meet the right guy!

Application: I'm sure **we all have prayer requests** that God has so far delayed answering. Whether it's for a family member to become a Christian or for someone we know to be free from addiction or healing from sickness or for healing of a broken relationship. **We may have even begged God to intervene and act** – but so far, He has been silent.

The great **Charles Spurgeon** gives some **advice** on this:

If you are sure, it is a right thing for which you are asking God – plead now, plead at noon, plead at night, plead on. With cries and tears spread out your case. Back up your

pleas with reasons. Order your arguments. Plead on the basis of the precious blood of Jesus. Set the wounds of Christ before the Father's eyes. Point to Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Point to Calvary and the Cross of Jesus. Enlist the crowned Prince, Jesus, the Priest who sits at the right hand of the Father. And resolve in your very soul that if souls not be saved, if your family not be blessed, if your own zeal not be revived, you will die with the plea on your lips.

What Spurgeon is describing is **unrelenting perseverance**.

If Elijah the prophet had to persevere – can we expect to snap our fingers and **have the Lord at our beck and call?**

How can we learn patience and perseverance – if everything always happens instantly?

What we can expect is that **our Heavenly Father will require steadfast endurance as we appeal to Him.**

We must learn not only to wait *on* God but wait *for* God.

Produces Answers in God's Perfect Timing

[Slide 4d-Perfect timing]

The fourth point – prayer: **produces answers in God's perfect timing.**

Finally, after praying and checking for rain seven times

V44 – the **servant reported** “*a cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea*”

That small cloud was enough for Elijah to know God had answered – and enough for Elijah to confidently tell King Ahab to hitch up his chariot and go before the rain stopped him (v44)

God answered in His own perfect timing

And **God's answer** here **brings great benefits.**

The rain meant: life, water for the soil, water for the people, water for the livestock. It meant grain for food and grass for the animals.

Let's not forget to give thanks to God – when He does answer!

Elijah's Run (vv45b-46)

[Slide 2-Heading]

Now the **second section in this passage** that we need to look at is **Elijah's run** – in verses 45b-46.

Elijah's knees that were bent in prayer are about to start running as Ahab rides off in his chariot.

This scene of Elijah the prophet running before Ahab the King's chariot shows us two things:

[Slide 2a-Elijah]

Firstly; it shows **Elijah is neither ashamed or afraid** of what he has done (with God's help) on Mount Carmel.

Secondly, if Elijah (the prophet) is running ahead of/before Ahab (the King) it means that **Ahab is following Elijah**; it **symbolizes the restoration of the proper order in Israel**: The **King following the prophet** (who is the messenger from the Lord).

It implies that God is placing a demand upon Ahab. Ahab is not to operate in his own autocratic way anymore but to submit to the divine word of God. Royal power must always seek prophetic direction from God; that's the picture we are meant to see.

Just as the people had to make a decision on Mount Carmel about the Real God; so too, Ahab has to make a decision for God too.

[Slide 2b-Grace]

God is offering grace to Ahab [to Ahab - the one who allowed Baal worship; who gave approval for a Baal temple and altar to be built; who participated in that Baal worship himself; who gave in to his wicked wife Jezebel and stood by and allowed her to butcher the Lord's prophets; and who pursued God's prophet Elijah relentlessly]. Yet God offered Ahab incredible grace.

Imagine the crazy scene of Elijah running ahead of Ahab's chariot and as they reach the turn off for Jezreel where Ahab's wife Jezebel waits and there's a light on in Jezebel's queen's quarters – **Ahab has the offer of grace in his hand – will he take it or will he go to the devil's bedroom?** We'll have to wait until next week to see what happens...

In the same way, **God offers His incredible grace to each person on this planet – no matter how sinful or bad they are – God offers them grace to come and repent – God offers the grace of our Lord Jesus – the grace of Jesus' death on a cruel cross – for people to have their sins to be forgiven – and the grace of rising Jesus to life 3 days later – so people can have eternal life.**

Just like Ahab – **people have a choice. People have to accept that gift of grace – maybe you're someone here this morning that hasn't accepted that gift of Jesus – **today is the day!****

Challenge (James 5:13-20)

[Slide 3-Heading]

Let me **leave us with a couple of challenges this morning.**

[Slide 3a-cloud]

1st – **Elijah reacted in faith to the sight of “a cloud as small as a man’s hand rising from the sea”.** That’s all Elijah needed to step out in faith. Are we able to join Elijah – with our “cloud as small as a man’s hand” and **step out in faith in God’s promises?**

[Slide 3b-Pray]

2nd – In our NT passage from James 5:13-20. The **Apostle James challenges us to pray?** But how is our prayer life? Remember when Jesus gave the Lord’s Prayer – He said “**WHEN you pray**” not “**IF you pray**”.

Are we praying? Are we praying for one another?

Are we praying for people to come to Jesus?

If we are sick, do we ask the elders to pray over us and anoint us?

Do we thank and praise God when we pray, do we confess our sins when we pray or do we go straight to asking God for something?

Prayer is God’s precious gift to us.

And James tells us - *the prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective.*

Let’s pray...

Father God, thank you for the precious gift of prayer.

Help us as we pray: to be have humble faith, pray according to your will; with patience and perseverance; trusting you will answer in your own perfect timing.

Help us to step out in faith, praying upon your promises and praying for your will to be done. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

Benediction (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Amen.