

## Sermon by Philip C. Herrmann, May 21, 1972

### Willo Bible Chapel, Willoughby, OH (41:13)

I'd like to speak to you this morning about one of the characters of the Old Testament that gives us a great many lessons for this day. He lived some 2800 years ago, and yet the person is as well-known as he was then. He's spoken of more in the New Testament than in the Old. In fact, you would only find five or six chapters in the Old Testament that tell us anything about him, and yet his influence is so great, his character so great, that we can well afford some 30, or 35 minutes in dwelling upon his life.

I'd like you to turn to I Kings, the first of the book of Kings, and the 19th chapter. Beginning at the first verse, "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah (Elijah is the person I have in mind) had done. And with all, how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. (by the way, that was 450. Of course he didn't do all the slaying, that would be impossible. But just as Pilate was said to have scourged the Lord, I believe that it was not Pilate that did that, but one of his soldiers. And so Elijah had help in the disposal of these false prophets.) Verse 2: "Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying 'So let the gods do to me, and more also if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.' And when he saw that (and I'd like you to note these five words, "And when he saw that." I shall try to explain what I believe they mean) And when he saw that he arose and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.' And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, 'Arise and eat.' And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.' And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God."

Horeb the mount of God was where the Law had been given. It was one of the peaks of Sinai where four or five hundred years before the Lord had given the people of Israel the Law, after they had come out of Egypt. "And he came thither (verse 9) into a cave, and lodged there. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, 'what doest thou here Elijah?' And he said "I have been very zealous 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."

"And He (that is, the Lord) said 'Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord.' And lo, the Lord passed by and a great and strong wind rent the mountain and brake in pieces 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. And after the fire, a still, small voice." Some other translations give a better expression. I think we wouldn't really know what was involved in a "still, small voice." A still voice would be almost unnoticeable. But it's a soft, gentle voice. That's the voice that God uses for his servants, and for men now, in this day of grace.

“And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entering-in of the cave.” And behold there came a voice to him, and said, ‘what doest thou here Elijah?’ ” The same question. “And he said, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord God of Hosts, because 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.’”

“And the Lord said to him, go return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu, the son of Nimshi, shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abol-Naholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.”

And it shall come to pass that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay. And him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet, I have left me 7000 in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him.”

It’s too bad that we haven’t been able, in the time, to read a little bit of the previous two chapters, that would have given us an entirely different idea of the quality, and the kind of person this man Elijah the Prophet was. For he is one of the amazing characters of the Old Testament. He was alone in standing against a whole nation. A whole nation had forsaken God, and had turned to Baal, and they were mixing the worship of Baal with the worship of the Lord, something that God can’t stand for. And so Elijah, for his name means “my God is Jehovah,” evidently came of a family of this very remnant, this very 7000 that the Lord had said had not yet bowed the knee to Baal.

There is always a remnant in every age, and those are the ones that God deals with. The mass of creation, the mass of men, the mass of nations throughout the earth are away from God and will continue to be so. But God in this age, in these last 1900 years since the Lord went back to heaven, he’s been taking out of each nation a people for himself, individuals, here and there, sometimes companies, but generally individuals. That was what the apostle James, in the city of Jerusalem, sometime after the Lord went back to heaven, that’s what he told the company there, that God was taking, in this age, he was taking out of each nation, Jew and Gentile, whereas God in previous years had been dealing only with the nation of Israel, and that’s what we’re dealing with in this chapter this morning, the nation of Israel.

But God now is taking out of every nation, Jew and Gentile, a people for himself, all on the basis of grace, not on the basis of law. The law that was the rule of life for the Israelites for 1500 years came to an end in the cross of Christ, when the nation rejected Christ fully, and he was put to death, but God raised him from the dead, and now he is at the right hand of God. Then God brought in the age of grace, and the Holy Spirit is now the one who directs the thought of and the worship of Christians, of those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. He directs it to the Lord himself.

Well the Lord was very much involved in this chapter that we’ve read. It’s a chapter entirely unlike the others that we read about Elijah. Elijah dared to stand before the King and tell him, that “as the Lord liveth, before he,” that is Elijah, “was standing, there wouldn’t be rain these years, according to his word.” And when that came to be true, when the truth of that dawned upon Ahab, he went to kill Elijah. The Lord hid Elijah by the brook Cherith, and amazingly, in this period that we read about, in this time of declension and decline in Israel, when Ahab and Jezebel were king and queen, and there was no worship of God in the land, God wrought miracles by the hand of Elijah. These were

supernatural things that only appeared, they hadn't appeared for many, many years, the previous ones were done by Moses in the land of Egypt, as you remember.

So God fitted the miracle to the case, and Elijah was fed by ravens. Just think of it, an unclean bird. A Jew would have nothing to do with that. And he was fed by these ravens morning and evening. In the meantime he drank of the brook, but almost immediately the brook dried up. There was no rain, nothing to feed the brook. So then the Lord told Elijah to go to Zarephath, which is in the north of Israel, in fact it was in the land of Sidon, what is equivalent right now to the south of Lebanon. And he said "I have appointed a widow to sustain thee." Now this was Gentile territory and it was entirely wrong for a Jew who believed in the Law and tried to keep the Law to obey that command, but he did it, and the Lord sustained him there. Another miracle happened, when he got to this place, he saw this widow woman, and evidently the Lord told him "this is the person." He asked for a drink of water, and then for a cake of flour, a cake made from flour. And she said, "I'm just at the end of my life. I'm just preparing, gathering up sticks to make a fire and have a last meal, me and my son." Elijah said, "As the Lord liveth, you give me that meal, the cruise of water shall not fail, neither shall the cake of flour, the meal of flour."

And so he was fed there, the Lord kept his promise, and worked this miracle, and this is one of the miracles that was a recurring miracle. I suppose men wouldn't believe it today, but the word of God is just as potent today, the word that we have in our Bibles, the word that God has provided for our soul's needs. not for our bodies, but for the need of our souls, bringing us into touch with him, keeping us in living touch with him. That still prevails.

Well, I said before that the character of Elijah was such that it continues on into the New Testament. In fact, the Lord was mistaken for Elijah, when the Lord asked "Who do men say that I am?" [Matthew 16:13] his disciples said, "Well, some say that you are the Prophet, some say Elijah, some say that you're Jeremiah." Doesn't seem to be any definite one on whom they fixed, but just think of it, Elijah was one. And the reason I believe, for saying Elijah, was that Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, had said that, almost in the last words of his book, that the Lord would send Elijah, before his coming of the great day of the Lord. So that the godly Israelite, one of the remnant, was looking for Elijah to come. And the disciples asked the Lord about it, "When is Elijah coming? Who is Elijah?" And the Lord I think very definitely proved that Elijah was John the Baptist. Not Elijah himself, although he appeared with the Lord and Moses in the Mount of Transfiguration, but Elijah, I do not believe, even though he is supposed to be one of the two witnesses in the Book of Revelation, I doubt very much that God would take a person from Heaven, such as Elijah went, in a whirlwind at the end of his life, that he would send him back again. John the Baptist was the true Elijah in the Lord's day. Who the Elijah of the coming day will be, I don't believe we have any knowledge of, or will know 'til it happens.

You remember also the Lord referred to Elijah in the first message that he gave in the synagogue of Nazareth. He said "There were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah but to none of them was Elijah sent, except to this widow woman in the city or town of Zarephath in Sidon." And then they mistook the Lord's words, just as he was dying, just as he was about to commend himself to God and go back to Him, on the cross he said, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" And the soldiers, or someone, mistook that expression, "My God My God" as Elijah. They said, "Let's see if Elijah will

come to save him.” [Matthew 27:49] Well the main reference in the rest of the Old [New] Testament to the fact of a person by the name of Elijah is given us in the book of James. And there he is cited as an example of fervent prayer, effectual prayer. He says the “fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much,” [James 5:16] that is, it has much power. Just think, Elijah was dependent just as we are, despite all the power, the courage and the power that Elijah showed in facing a nation, alone, but with God back of him, nevertheless he was a man of prayer. It says that Elijah prayed that it might not rain, and it didn’t rain by the space of three and a half years.

I’m sure that Elijah never prayed that it might last that long, because this made him public enemy number one. Just think of anyone praying here, in this country, that God would withhold the rain. Although we have rain withheld, rain doesn’t happen in some of the distant parts of the country for months, just think what would happen if a whole country, a whole nation had no rain for three and a half years.

So, Elijah probably never prayed for the length of that cessation of rain but he prayed that it might not rain. And then it says he prayed again. At the end of that time he prayed, and the Lord sent rain. So Elijah was a man of prayer. His name “my God is Elijah” was given him by his parents. And he was one that fulfilled that; he kept true to his name. He lived up to his name; how many other don’t. Well, going back to the story of his ways during that period of three and a half years, the Lord told him, near the end of that time, to go and seek out Ahab. He appeared before Ahab, and Ahab immediately accused him of being the enemy, because of all the troubles of those three and a half years. Elijah said “I haven’t troubled Israel, it is you, and the ways you have been conducting this nation and getting them to forsake God, breaking his laws, and worshipping Satan,” for all the false idols, the idols of the nations surrounding Israel were satanic, demonic.

Well Elijah meets Ahab, and demands that Ahab gather the people together for a test, to see whether God is God, or Baal is. And he provides the prophets of Baal, 450, in fact I believe there were even more there than that, showing that the power of Baal was tremendous in the land at that time. And he demanded a test, said get all these prophets, and let them provide a sacrifice, build an altar, put the creature to be sacrificed upon it, put the wood under the sacrifice, but don’t put any fire on it. And I will do the same, and we will see which one answers by fire. The God who answers by consuming the sacrifice, let him be God.

Ahab agreed to that, though evidently it was not known to Jezebel. Then the day comes, and the prophets of Baal perform their part of it, and as the hours pass on and nothing happens, Elijah indulges in a little bit of sarcasm. He says, “Call him a little louder. Call your god a little louder. If he’s god he should be able to hear. Perhaps he’s asleep, or maybe he’s gone on a journey. Call him louder. And they do, but nothing happens.

And when they give up, then Elijah has his chance, and he prays the prayer, “Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, let it be known that thou art God in Israel.” Then he provides the sacrifice, puts the wood under the sacrifice, rebuilds the altar with twelve stones, each stone representing one of the tribes of Israel. Then to make it doubly sure that there’s no fire under the sacrifice, he has a trench built around the altar, and fills it with water. Now some have said, you’re talking about water when there is no water, no rain. But just remember that this place where this test took place was right at the edge of the Mediterranean, although it was Mt. Carmel, Mr. Carmel is right at the edge of the Mediterranean so

they had plenty of salt water. So that argument falls flat.

Well at the time after the prayer Elijah prayed that God would send the fire, and he does. A marvelous thing happened. God not only consumed the sacrifice, but the stones, and the water, in the trench, and everything around it. There was nothing left. And immediately the people say, “The Lord, he is God.” That was proof to them. And I believe that Elijah took this as a proof that God had answered the prayer that was first given by Solomon, at the dedication of the Temple about a hundred years before. I’ll just read you the prayer of Solomon, at the dedication of this temple. Thinking ahead of just such circumstances as we’re speaking about this morning, Solomon, divinely guided, I believe in this prayer, prays this. This is part of that 56 verses: “When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, (that is, Jerusalem) and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way in which they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance.” [I Kings 8:35-36]

I believe that Elijah took this test, and the effect of it, the result of it as the answer to Solomon’s prayer, here. That God had really accepted their belief that he was their God. Well, I believe the present chapter, the part of it that I’ve read, shows otherwise. It shows that while they were convinced by this test, it was not a true belief. The belief vanished as soon as the rain came. And very shortly after this, a day or two, the rain came, and flooded the land, and enabled them to go back to their farms, and their work, whatever it was, for this was planting time, and they forgot about the prophet. And this, I believe, gives us the explanation of why this tremendous change from a man who was so bold, he not only withstood the King and the prophets, but maintained the Lord’s name, proved that he was God, and that he was the same God that had delivered the nation from the bondage of Egypt.

Hear this man now, when he saw that, I call your attention to these five words, “when he saw that,” that while they had said “the Lord is God” they were not backing him. They were not true to their word. There was not a hand lifted in Elijah’s behalf. No one stood with him. He was still alone. And instead of praying to God, as he had prayed for rain, or prayed for lack of rain, and then for rain, he forgot to pray, and he took this threat far more seriously than it should have been, for she could not have done anything, if the Lord had stood with him.

But it just shows, and the remainder of the chapter, the attitude of Elijah shows, I believe, that God had something to teach Elijah. That’s one of the wonderful things about the word of God, is that God’s servants, their sins, their failures are not overlooked. God recalls them, for our benefit. There are two verses in the New Testament that prove that what I’m saying to you this morning has a divine lesson. God intends us to pay attention to what happened to his people of old. To learn the lesson that they didn’t learn, or that they did learn, and apply it to ourselves.

Those two verses read something like this: “whatsoever things were written aforetime,” [Romans 15:4] that is, written in the year 100 AD, or a little before that, the things before that, the 2000 years or so before that, they “were written for our learning,” “upon whom the ends of the age are come.” And the verse in Corinthians tells us, that all these things, the things that happened in the Old Testament, “are written for our learning, for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the age are come.” [1 Cor 10:11] So that we should seek to learn lessons. The very place that Elijah took, the power he displayed, the courage, and so on, misled him, and he thought he was the only one. And you notice, I read in the

fourth verse, that he prayed a prayer that he should never have prayed, because God wasn't going to answer that. God had some work for him still to do, and he was a failure, he thought, and now his work was done so the Lord should take away his life.

I guess some of us have had similar feelings; you don't have success all the time, failure gets you. But he should have prayed for guidance. The same God that kept away the rain and then provided the rain, miraculously, as the previous chapter tells us, that God could have preserved Elijah's life from any one, and taken care of him.

Well, he said, "it is enough now O Lord. Take away my life, for I am no better, not better than my fathers." What a revealing statement! Whether to show that in his period of despair, of despondency, he tells out the truth, he's not better than his fathers. Probably wasn't, but doesn't it show that he had been thinking all along that he was better. And perhaps so far as results are concerned, he was better. But for a man to say that I am not better than my father is a very revealing statement. And then the two statements that he repeats to the Lord show that he hasn't changed his mind any, that he is still the only servant that God has. God had to tell him that there's 7000 that haven't bowed the knee to Baal. Of course they weren't with Elijah, they weren't active witnesses, they did nothing to proclaim the truth that God was their God, but Elijah has to be corrected.

And so we have this remarkable statement, and it's remarkable to see how the Lord uses circumstances to appeal to his servant. First, when Elijah gets away from the land, he is in Beersheba, which is quite a distance from the place that he had previously been living, from Jezreel, where the fire and the consuming of the sacrifice took place. He's already run a long time, and he's dead tired. And the angel of the Lord comes to him, and provides a meal, in fact two meals, and the second meal is such that he can go in the power and the strength of that for forty days and forty nights. How different, the Lord had, when he was here upon earth, he ate nothing for forty days and forty nights.

Well, Elijah travels these forty days and forty nights and comes back to the very place that the nation had begun, had started from, 500 years before. And then God gives him a display of what had happened there, in fact I believe even a greater display. We don't read at the giving of the Law that there was this mighty wind, that shook the mountains, that shook the rocks. God was showing Elijah a sample of his power, and that power is still available. We speak of atomic power, but that's only one of the ways in which God can destroy. Yet this was not a case of destruction, this was a case of instruction. The first time, when the wind had ceased, the Lord asked the question to Elijah, "what are you doing here?"

What an arresting question. That must have had some appeal to Elijah. It's interesting, the questions that the Lord asked throughout history. Remember the very first question that was asked of our fallen parents was to Adam, to Adam and Eve, "where art thou?" Now it's simply silly to think that the Lord didn't know where Adam was. Adam was hiding, but I believe the Lord was seeking to get Adam to think, where am I in my soul. And I think that's a very good question for us, too. Where are we in our soul, what is our relationship with God, how do we stand before him? Is there some secret sin, or something between us and him that keeps us from enjoying his presence?

Then just think of the question the Lord asked Moses. Moses was learned in all the learning of the Egyptians, and yet God took him away from there and sent him into a desert place. And when 40 years of that had passed, then the Lord came to him and said "now go back to the land of Israel and demand

of Pharaoh that he let the people of Israel go.” And Moses immediately starts to equivocate, “Oh, I can’t speak, I’m not a good speaker.” The Lord asks him, “who made man’s mouth?” indicating that he would give him the ability to speak to Pharaoh even though he was the mightiest monarch of the time. He had all the power in this world, and all the power of Satan back of him.

But God used Moses and the signs, the miracles that were wrought to deliver the people from Israel. And you remember Joshua; in the land of Caanan, they run up against fierce opposition. The Lord had said, “Every place that the sole of your foot steps on, that would be your territory.” [Joshua 1:3] but they had to fight for it. And then when Joshua sees the Lord he falls down on his face, I don’t believe in worship but in fear. The Lord says, “why liest thou upon thy face; get up, stand before me.” [Joshua 7:10]

And then you’ll remember the question that the Lord asked Job. Job was the most remarkable person of his time, yet the Lord had a wonderful question for him. “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” [Job 38:4] Yes, that’s a question, isn’t it. Where were any of us when God laid the foundations of the earth? Men speak of billions of years, well it may be more than that. Who knows. We shall know in eternity, but not now.

And so these questions are wonderful, in their way, and this question had to be repeated because the Lord gave up the tests of the earthquake and the fire. And Elijah was not impressed by those, but what brought him out of the cave was to hear a soft, gentle voice. And that soft, gentle voice asks the same question, “What doest thou here?” You see the Lord sometimes speaks to us through his Word; that’s how he speaks to us now. He speaks to our conscience and to our heart. The question and the words, the voice to the heart is a soft, gentle voice. and I’d like just in closing to give some of those soft, gentle words that the Lord spoke when he was here upon earth, because to conclude our chapter would take too long. Elijah is told that 7000, he was wrong only by 7000 percent. Just think of it, one can be dreadfully wrong when you come to the things of God. And Elijah certainly was that. But how gracious of God to save in such simple, not angry, but soft, gentle words. The words that God uses today, he uses to the sinner, and to those who realize their need of him. He says Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest to your souls.” [Matthew 11:28,29] Think of that; who else could offer such a prize, who else could offer such a gift? “I will give you rest.” Trust in me, and “you shall find rest to your souls.” And these are eternal gifts.

Think of his words to Nicodemus, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” [John 3:16] We have life now, but this is going to come to an end. But the life that the Lord Jesus Christ offers us, and offered to Nicodemus, and to every one, “For God so loved the world,” this is eternal life, this is life, the life of God himself. The best gift at God’s disposal, that’s ours, if we’ll only reach out the hand of faith and take it.

I think of those words in the fifth of John, “He that heareth my word,” just as Elijah heard that soft, gentle voice now this Savior that is now upon earth, the one who spoke to Elijah, he’s now upon earth here in the form of a man, ready to die for man, to prove his love. He says “He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me,” that is his Father, because he was here to speak the Father’s words, “hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed, *is passed*, from death

unto life.” [John 5:24] Who else could speak in such gentle, soft terms, and offer so much? Why is it that so few take advantage of it, avail themselves of the greatest gift at God’s disposal?

Well, we find that Elijah did the Lord’s bidding, he annointed these three persons. A successor to himself, and that successor proved to be the prophet Elisha, whose name means “God is salvation.” God is not only God to be worshipped, but he is the God of our salvation. He is the one that provides for our eternal blessing. He is the one that is the fulfillment of what was promised to Abraham, that in Abraham’s seed, that was in Christ, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. All the families of the earth, everyone, could receive the best that God has given.

Now, if there’s anyone here, in the last minute of my little address, I would like to appeal to you. The God of Elijah can be your God. even as he is the God of the simple, the common folk. When the Lord came to earth he didn’t appeal to the great, although the message was for them just as well. It wasn’t for the righteous, those who thought they didn’t need Christ. The Lord said, “I came not to call the righteous” (that is, those who thought they were righteous) “but sinners to repentance.” [Luke 5:32] If we take our place as sinners, who deserve nothing at God’s hands, but just are willing to receive what he has, and as in the words of Solomon, turn from their wicked way, turn from their evil way, confess their sins, and come, then God will send his blessing.

Shall we pray. Gracious God and Father, we ask thy blessing upon the word spoken. We ask for journeying mercies for the young people as they go on their picnic. May they not forget to turn to thee and thank thee for the blessings we have in this land and age, for the glory of salvation that is theirs if they have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that this is available for every one, not only in this room but throughout the earth. We thank thee for this, and pray thy blessing now in the Lord’s precious name. Amen.

The meeting is over.