

Mount Carmel: 'Then Elijah prayed'

Please read I Kings 18: 16 – 1 Kings 19:18 and James 5: 13-18 and then pray: *God of Elijah, hear our prayer as we open your Word. Speak, your servants are listening. Amen.*

Today we face Mount Carmel as we continue this sermon series on the great biblical mountains. (Show pictures of Carmel) There is of course, one name above all others which comes to mind and is deeply associated with Mount Carmel. I speak of **Elijah**, the mighty prophet who when confronted with the most heinous form of religious corruption and apostasy, courageously faced the fatally compromised king of Israel, king Ahab, and spoke these words of prophetic power, faith, and conviction:

*'I have not made trouble for Israel,' Elijah replied. 'But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals. **Now** summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.'* (I Kings 18: 18-19)

The sparks will now fly in front of the entire population at Mount Carmel. Elijah will triumph in the name of the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. (18:36) The prophets of Baal (450 of them) will all be humiliated and then slaughtered. Ultimately King Ahab and his evil wife Jezebel will perish, and they will perish *'according to the word spoken by the prophet Elijah.'* (1 Kings 21: 20 – 25, 2 Kings 9: 36-37)

But Elijah is not just clearly associated with Mount Carmel, he is also connected as Moses was, with Mount Sinai, also known as Mount Horeb; for it was there that Elijah fled from the bloodthirsty Jezebel and met with God outside a cave on the side of that holy mountain, known as 'the mountain of God.' (1 Kings 19:8-9) Here Elijah famously did not meet God through a powerful wind that blew against the mountain, nor through an earthquake which shook it, nor through the fire which blazed passed in front of him, **but through a gentle whisper.** (1 Kings 19:12) God whispered to his prophet on Mount Sinai, enabling the prophet to recover from terrible depression, and return from where he came, to continue his powerful prophetic ministry, which included the call of Elisha who would be the one to replace Elijah. (I Kings 19: 15-18)

During this last week, I have been reflecting on the life and outstanding ministry of Elijah. I will now speak about this briefly. But then I want to go on and ask the most important question facing us today. Why was Elijah such a success in bringing God glory? What was the key to this man's ministry and powerful impact upon the life and faith of Israel? What made Elijah tick? What enabled Elijah to succeed and conquer in the name of his God, **who is our God?**

We worship and serve the God of Elijah, who, as Elijah pointed out in his prayer on Mount Carmel, is the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob, and in turn is the Creator of heaven and earth; and as the NT reveals, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Elijah, just like us, served this God, but he did so with an amazing degree of fidelity and faithfulness. Our God entered the world in Jesus, God's Son, who Elijah, along with Moses, served on the Mount of Transfiguration. (Matthew 17:3)

We know nothing of Elijah's background, other than that he was a Tishbite from Tishbe in Gilead. **His story begins in 1 Kings 17** (1 Kings 17:1). This is how Elijah is suddenly introduced onto the world's stage. His first task is to confront an evil and unfaithful King with a most direct word of judgement concerning a severe and long period of drought which would cripple Israel economically. Elijah appears to come from nowhere to prominent prophetic power and influence.

Ahab, the king faced down by Elijah, reigned in Israel (the ten tribes of the now divided nation) for 22 years in the 9th century BC. During a very turbulent political period of extreme covenantal unfaithfulness which spanned 209 years and ended famously with devastation by the Assyrian army in

722 BC, Ahab was the 7th King in a line of 19 Kings. All these kings, to one degree or another, were unfaithful to God. Ahab was the worst of the lot. Elijah arose to challenge Ahab. This is what we read about Ahab and the evil and influential Queen Jezebel. (Read 1 Kings 16: 29-33, 1 Kings 21:25-26)

The length of the drought was completely controlled by 'the word of the Lord' that came through Elijah. For three years as the drought went on, the Lord supernaturally provided for Elijah's need of food and water. (1 Kings 17: 2-24) During this period Elijah raised the only son of the widow of Zarephath from the dead. This widow declared what was to be eventually believed throughout all Israel – 'Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.' (1 Kings 17:24)

The highpoint in Elijah's ministry is in his confrontation with the prophets of Baal on **Mount Carmel** which can be read in 1 Kings 18: 16-40. God through Elijah demonstrated that he is God and there is no other. Baal was proved to be deaf, dumb, powerless. God answers Elijah's prayer with awesome fire, consuming not just Elijah's bull sacrifice, but also the sacred twelve-stone altar upon which it had been placed. The people of Israel declare their allegiance to the God of Israel, and the prophets of Baal perish.

This is when Elijah climbs to the **very top of Mount Carmel** with his servant to kneel and pray for rain with his head between his knees. He had received a word from the Lord that the rain will now come following on from the all-consuming fire. Elijah prays hard, sending his servant no fewer than seven times to look for rain clouds. When finally, his servant declares that he can now see a cloud 'the size of a man's hand' rising above the Mediterranean, Elijah knows his prayer has been honoured and answered, and rain will soon arrive. The drought is over. A torrential downpour begins.

But trouble and challenges are not over for Elijah, because Jezebel hungers for revenge, and wants Elijah dead. For the first time in his life and ministry, Elijah is gripped by fear, and he falters, running away to save his own life. But what he failed to remember at this point, and **what we often fail to remember**, is that our lives are in the hands of our sovereign God. God held Elijah's life and destiny in his hand. And God holds our lives and destinies in His loving and faithful hands. The God who brought us to birth will ultimately carry us to his side at the time He decides. Our lives are in His hands.

Elijah eventually gets back on track, despite suffering a horrible depression, and goes on to serve the Lord in numerous ways before he is taken into heaven, not by physical death, but by miraculous translation from earth to heaven in a dazzling chariot of fire. The prophet who had prayed under a broom tree 'that he might die' ended up never dying. What an incredible adventure of faith, service and victory Elijah had been on. His story occupies only 8 chapters of Holy Scripture – and yet the imprint of his life and witness has stretched across century after century. This how J Sidlow-Baxter summarises the great life of the prophet Elijah;

This spectacular man of God rivets our attention to good purpose. He is one of the most remarkable figures in the whole story of Israel... One of Israel's most startling and romantic characters, he suddenly appears on the scene as the crisis-prophet, with thunder on his brow and tempest in his voice. He disappears just as suddenly, swept skywards in a chariot of fire. Between his first appearing and his final disappearing lies a succession of amazing miracles.

Elijah's greatness and prominence was shown in the ways **God's favour rested upon him** and raised him up to the status of biblical legend. We see God's special favour in the following ways:

- His dramatic removal from the earth without death – the chariot of fire removing him.
- His honoured appearance, with Moses, on the Mount of transfiguration with Jesus.

- Elijah was the great prototype of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. The Baptist not only looked remarkably like Elijah with his camel hair garment and leather belt, but he strode out onto the world's stage "in the spirit and power of Elijah." (Luke 1:17) John the Baptist was Elijah mark two, but without the miracles.
- The way Elisha, Elijah's successor, received a "double portion" of Elijah's spirit and blessing and went on to do even more miracles than Elijah himself, many of them similar in character, some of them being the most outstanding miracles recorded in Holy Scripture. The mantle of Elijah was taken up by Elisha – a what a mantle to inherit. (2 Kings 2: 11-18)

Those are 4 ways Elijah knew the special favour and blessing of God. But now let us consider what **the main feature of Elijah's incredible ministry** consisted of. Is it possible to summarise the main source of Elijah's success? Can we do this? Can we know this? Yes, we can! The main contributory factor to Elijah's success was *simply this*;

Elijah knew and believed and trusted in the God who hears and answers prayer.

Elijah believed and acted upon his faith in the one true God who hears and answers prayer – and God can choose to do this on some occasions with the most dramatic power.

When *James wrote his letter* about practical and faithful Christianity, and wanted to include much about the need and importance of prayer – he concluded his thoughts by looking towards Elijah's prayer life. James wrote more about prayer in his letter than any of the other NT writers, although all the apostles believed, knew, and demonstrated the power of prayer. And when James needed a great example of a biblical hero who was effective in prayer – **he turned to Elijah.**

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again, he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. (James 5:16b-18)

This is how Douglas J Moo explains this in his excellent biblical commentary of the letter of James:

*But it is not Elijah's special prophetic endowment or unique place in history that interests James, but the fact that though he was a man 'of like nature to ourselves,' his prayer had great power in its effects. He wants his readers to recognise **that this power of prayer is available to all who are seriously following the Lord** and not just to a special few.*

Elijah demonstrates to us, often with miraculous and powerful effect, that God hears and answers the prayer of his faithful, trusting people – people who are no different to him. Yes, Elijah was a very great prophet, but he was **an ordinary man** who suffered from doubt and depression and endured many struggles, *just like we do*. We are no different to him says James. God can and will answer our prayers too! Do we believe that? *Do we believe in the God who hears and answers the prayers of simple, ordinary believers like us?* We follow and reach out to same God who Elijah addressed in prayer on top of Mount Carmel, under a broom tree in a desert, and the side of Mount Sinai. Not only should we believe, like Elijah did, in the power and efficacy of prayer, we must also know and accept that we ordinary Christians **possess the right and the authority to pray to the one true God!**

So now for personal application – which is call to each one of us to prayer – and perhaps a special season of prayer – which can begin right now during Lent and extend to the day of Pentecost which this year falls on **May 24th**. I wish to call Christchurch to a season of prayer and to an ongoing commitment to prayer. The timing is perfect. We have our LYCIG vision in place, and we have just had a serious stewardship campaign centring around the gifts and calling God has given to everyone one

of us: **Now we must pray. Now we must call upon God! Now we must seek God.** Now we must reach out for his blessing, anointing and strength. There will at least 3 approaches to this:

1. Together in prayer is our monthly prayer meeting, which meets for one hour between 6-7pm on the first Sunday of every month. TIP is meeting tonight (Sunday 1st March). I would like to challenge people to engage in prayer during this one-hour period each month. You can do so by coming to Church and joining the small number who have already been meeting for prayer each month. Or, alternatively, you can pray at home, at some point during that hour, or for the whole hour. Turn off the phone, the TV, stop whatever you are doing – and turn to God in prayer – for 5 minutes, 15 minutes or for longer. Let us unite in prayer for God's renewing power to bless and guide Christchurch! Will you do that? Can you at least give a few minutes to prayer during that hour each month. I will keep reminding the Church of this call to prayer.
2. **May 2026, will be a month of prayer**, where praying for our growth and renewal and stewardship of our gifts for God's glory will be our priority. I would like us to open the Church **7 times** for prayer (a number significant in the Elijah story – 1 Kings 18:43-44) during this period. Seven times for one hour. Seven different days and different times, to give everyone the opportunity to come into this worship space and sit for at least a few minutes and pray for the fire of God, the Spirit of God to descend upon the work and evangelism of this Church. Those 7 times of hourly prayer periods will be well advertised. Elijah did not pray long prayers – but they were effective and powerful. If people really cannot come into this prayer space, then they can pray in their own homes during those seven hours.
3. In February, at our Café Church we began '**The Prayer Course**' which has been written by Peter Grieg, a Christian leader and writer who has been inspiring Christians around the world to prayer for many years. Why not join us for the Prayer Course? This will boost your confidence to pray, and give any who attend practical help, encouragement, and guidance. At the first session, Pete Greig told us, just like Elijah and James would – to 'keep is simple, keep it real and keep it going.' The Prayer Course continues March 8th at 6pm.

We are praying specifically for the Church to grow, for our Church to be renewed in life and power and love. We are praying during Lent and Easter in surrender and humility before the cross of Christ, and praying for resurrection life and power to fill our hearts; and then from ascension to Pentecost for the fire of the Spirit to fall and equip us for bold witness. **'God of Elijah, hear our pray – send the fire – send the fire today!** At Pentecost, the Spirit came in wind and fire. (Acts 2: 1-4) We urgently need to see and experience this reality again. The God who answers by fire!

There is a very great need in our nation, as there was in Israel at the time Elijah emerged on the scene of their painful national decline. There is a need for us to pray that the people of our struggling and divided nation **come to know that the Lord is God!** (1 Kings 18: 36-37) The God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob is the Lord and there is no other! The idols which many have followed have been exposed as empty and demonic. (1 Corinthians 10:20) The God of Elijah is gracious and compassionate and can send the fire of His Spirit as he has done before. Prayer is the answer and the hope – and the way to see our population declaring as the people of Israel did on Mount Carmel – **'The Lord - he is God! The Lord – he is God! (1 Kings 18: 36-39).**

Amen!

(Revd Peter J Clarkson 1.3.26)

