



Lessons from Elijah's Life

Claiming God's Promises

Date: 4 March 2020

Text: 1 Kings 18:41-46

Key Lesson: Faith is believing what God said He would do.

Ahab is Unmoved

Evidently unmoved by God sending fire from heaven, wicked King Ahab showed no sign or personal repentance. Instead of joining his people in shouting, "the LORD He is the God", he was just a silent bystander. Even when Elijah and the spiritually revived people killed his 450 prophets of Baal, as, he just watched without comment.

If we are not careful, we too can respond nonchalantly when God does something great in our midst. Often, we are slow to praise God for His provisions and answers to prayer, soon to forget, and quick to complain or worry when the next challenge comes up.

Perhaps Ahab had been grumbling to Elijah during the long prayers and dances of his prophets, that he was hungry and thirsty. If not, Elijah knew that this weak and selfish monarch expressed no concern for his suffering people. He had no empathy. He thought only of himself. He still had food and water and that was most important to him. He was a lousy leader. Now that the excitement had settled a bit, Elijah said to Ahab, "Get thee up, eat and drink" (v.41). Ah! That is what he had been waiting to hear!

Folks, selfishness is a terrible sin, yet one that we often fail to see in ourselves. It is valuing self more than others. It has caused conflict in countless families and divided myriads of marriages. The Bible gives us valuable counsel on selfishness. (Luke 9:23) "And he [Jesus] said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Acts 20:35) "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Romans 15:1-2) "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification." (1 Corinthians 10:24) "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." (Galatians 6:2) "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Ephesians 5:21) "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." (Philippians 2:4) "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

Pastor Alan Carr notes, "Those who live in the flesh may talk big and act strong, but they are, in fact, the weakest of men. The true strong man is one who rules, not is ruled by, his passions. Like so many who attend church, their bodies are there, but their hearts and minds are thousands of miles away. You see, our hearts are revealed by what we think about during service, where we rush off to after service and by what we get the most excited about. Some can't even sit through an entire service! *By the way, your attention span for spiritual things is a barometer of your spiritual growth!* Some folks can't seem to sit still through a 45 minute sermon, but they can sit for hours and watch a ball game or a race. It's all a matter of your priorities! This sad state of affairs is seen clearly when one compares the interest in prayer meeting as opposed to an eating meeting!"¹

Prepare for Rain

Elijah also told King Ahab, "There is a sound of abundance of rain." (v.41) Did Elijah actually hear an abundance of rain coming? He did not hear it literally, but he did hear it by faith. God had promised to send rain after he met with Ahab (1Ki 18:1). Elijah believed God's promise.

The Bible contains many promises; however, not every promise in the Bible is one that you can claim. Many were to Israel. Others were to individuals. There are however, many promises that you can and should claim. How can we identify the promises we can and should claim? Read the context and find out to whom God gave the promise. General promises that God gave to believers in general are ours to claim. For example, (Psalms 55:22) "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (James 1:5) "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Though we must not try to claim promises given to others, often such promises contain principles of God's general character that we can claim.

Two Opposite Leaders

While Ahab went up to eat and drink, satisfying his selfishness, Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel to pray (v.42). Why did Elijah not invite Ahab to pray with him? Ahab was in no spiritual condition to pray. He gave no indication of even being a believer. If he was, he certainly was far from spiritual (Psalm 66:18). Here again, we see the importance of spiritual separation (Amos 3:3). What were the crowds of people doing during this time? God does not tell us. Perhaps Elijah told them he was going up to pray and that they could go home and expect rain soon.

¹ Alan Carr, https://www.sermonnotebook.org/elijah/1%20Kings%2018_41-46.htm

Look at these two leaders. Ahab was satisfying his fleshly appetite around a royal picnic table spread in a shaded tent on the mountainside. Servants fanned him. Others catered to him while he indulged in his feast. Elijah, alone on the mountaintop, was kneeling in the setting sun with his face between his knees asking God to fulfil His promise for rain. The king honoured himself. The prophet honoured the LORD. The king ignored the needs of his people. The prophet interceded for the needs of his people. The king relaxed in ease. The prophet wrestled with God. Which kind of leader would you want as your leader? Which kind of leader are you for those under you?

Elijah's Prayer of Faith

Take a closer look at Elijah's prayer. Alan Carr notes six characteristics of his prayer.² 1) He was **humble** as he bowed before the LORD. 2) He was **specific** as he prayed. 3) He was **earnest** or sincere about his prayer. 4) He was **persistent**. Even after six negative weather reports, he kept praying. 5) He was **expectant**. His faith did not waver. 6) He was **answered**. God sent the promised rain. When our prayers lack the first five characteristics, we cannot expect to receive God's answer. May the Lord teach us to pray!

While Elijah prayed, he sent his servant to check the weather forecast (v.43). He was to report what he saw over the Mediterranean Sea. He came back and reported that he saw nothing. Elijah had him repeat this exercise seven times. When he returned the seventh time, his forecast had changed slightly. He reported a little cloud like a man's hand (v.44). Immediately, Elijah knew that God's promised rain was on its way. Note the message he sent to King Ahab (v.44b). Ahab was to prepare (literally, bind up or yoke up) his chariot horses and get down to Jezreel that the rain stop him not. The coming downpour of rain will be blinding and the flash floods will make the rivers impassable. The iron wheels of his chariot will drag heavily in the mud.

Travelling to Jezreel

Between the time that Elijah's servant saw the small cloud until the time that Ahab headed for Jezreel, the sky became black with clouds and a wild with wind (v.45). Then the LORD sent a great rain. This was a downpour of rain. After holding back the rain for 3 ½ years, the LORD now "pulled the plug" and let it all come down. My didn't it rain! Ahab rode to Jezreel, but he could not out-speed the rain.

In the next verse (v.46) we see something unique. It begins, "And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah." That which was about to take place was beyond human ability. The hand of the LORD was on Elijah to do the impossible. He girded up his loins by pulling up his heavy wet robe and tucking it into his belt. That he could do. When God gives us a job to do, we must do our part before He will give us the ability to do what we cannot do. Then Elijah ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. That he could not do in human power. He reached the city entrance before Ahab reached it.

Commentators interpret Elijah's running ahead of Ahab in at least **two ways**. Some believe that he simply ran the 27 km to Jezreel over the foot trails in pouring rain and **got there before Ahab**. Remember, this is in the late afternoon or early evening. The day has been long and exhausting. For a fit runner to run such a course without rain in the cool of the day would be a big task. For a prophet who has spent the past 3 ½ years in hiding, without a lot of exercise, at the end of a busy day, in pouring rain, wearing a drenched heavy garment, that was a supernatural feat. Other commentators believe that **Elijah was acting as the king's guide, running in front of his chariot**. Daniel Whedon's Commentary states, "The mode of doing honour to Ahab by running before his chariot was in accordance with the customs of the East, even to this day." JFB Commentary adds, "It was anciently, and still is, in some countries of the East, customary for kings and nobles to have runners before their chariot, who are tightly girt for the purpose. The prophet, like the Bedouins of his native Gilead, had been trained to run; and as the hand of the Lord was with him, he continued with unabated agility and strength. It was, in the circumstances, a most proper service for Elijah to render."

Because I find no other reason that Elijah would go to Jezreel where Jezebel was waiting, I tend to think that the second interpretation is more likely. Though Elijah was the victor of the Mount Carmel challenge, he was **still humble and respectful** to King Ahab. He did not respect his rebellion against God, his weak national leadership or his unrepentant self-centred attitude, but he did respect his office as king over Israel. **That is a good reminder to us. We must be respectful toward any leader over us, whether it our parent, a teacher, a boss, your pastor, a police officer, or a government official. We may not agree with the leader's choices or actions, but we still must show him respect for his office. That does not mean that we cannot disagree, but we need to do so respectfully.**

² Alan Carr, Ibid.