

Elijah

We begin a mini series today, a two-parter that looks at the life of Elijah this week, and Elisha next week. An opportunity to think about who they were, what they did for God, how He worked through them and what we can learn for ourselves from this.

I'm going to start with a biography of Elijah and then move on to think about some of the events that we've just read about and what they might be saying to us –what might God .be wanting to say through them.

Okay, so who was Elijah and what did he do ?

Well we don't have that much information about him, but we do know some things...

A biography of Elijah

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There is nothing about his calling or commissioning by God to be a prophet – we gather that he is one from the way he speaks

He lived around 100 years after King David, in the Northern Kingdom of Israel – this is after the split into the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

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King Ahab has married Jezebel who is very into Baal worship.

Baal is the god responsible for the weather (or so the people believe) he can punish with drought or bless with rain.

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There are some interesting parallels between Moses and Elijah.

Elijah returns to Horeb – sacred mountain where God had made himself known to Moses

Elijah is accompanied and succeeded by Elisha, as Moses was by Joshua

God answers Elijah by fire on two occasions and this seems to look back to the exhibition of God's presence and judgement in fire in the Exodus narratives

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1.Elijah heard God and did what God wanted.

The word of the Lord came to Elijah (18v1) so he went (18v2)

Even though it was obviously going to be risky to obey God, Elijah did it, and apparently without question.

It got me wondering about how we hear God speaking to us. Do we hear God very clearly ? It seems to be the privilege of a few to hear God's voice directly, and the rest of us are left to do our best at working out from hints, clues and nudges where God might be leading us.

We don't actually know how the word of the Lord came to Elijah, maybe it wasn't in a way that we would here God speaking, but when he did hear it he acted on it.

So I want to challenge us this morning and say 'when we hear the word of God do we act on it ?' Or are we sitting on things we know God has spoken about, just hoping they might go away or that He might have got it wrong ?

The second thing to say about Elijah is that ...

2. Elijah answered courageously (18v18)

God's call had given him a confidence

Isn't there something great about being given confidence – it's empowering, it frees us up to do stuff we couldn't otherwise manage.

Sometimes being loved is enough to give us confidence, or having someone standing in the background supporting, or having had words of encouragement spoken to us.

I remember as a kid losing my football in someone's garden and being too frightened to go and get it because there were 'big boys' playing near by, (who probably didn't care what I was doing – but I was nervous of them)

So I ran home and got my dad ,who came and just stood and watched while I got the ball. His presence was enough to give me confidence.

God equips those he calls. If He has spoken to you, about something, called you to do something, he will give you the ability and the confidence to do it. As a father who watches over and loves his children, he will equip you.

3. Elijah had great faith (18v36ff)

This was a big ask. Elijah had an awful lot to lose if God didn't deliver, but Elijah trusted that God would do what he'd said he would.

He trusted presumably because of previous experience. He knew that the God who had led the people miraculously out of exile was his God too. He knew that the God who had taken care of the people in the desert and led them into the promised land was his God too. And he believed that the God who had called him to go and sort out the prophets of Baal and call the people back to Yahweh would again deliver. And he was right !

Where does our faith come into play ?

Okay, so we might never be expected to exhibit faith in such a dramatic way as Elijah. I'm sure the Lichfield Mercury would massively increase its readership if we started soaking things in water and then calling down fire ! People would be eager to read about a bunch of nutty Christians

But there are many times in life when things look uncertain, and we are called to demonstrate our faith in God.

If it helps us to look back at all God has done in the past, then lets do that. God has been faithful in the past – we have no reason to doubt his faithfulness into the future.

Have you ever been to a football match when your team plays really differently in the two halves? Often they play better in the second half after the manager has torn a strip off them at half-time. I have to say that sadly watching Sunderland play is often a match of two halves, except the second half is usually much more dismal than the first and almost certainly involves letting in a late goal. This account of Elijah in 1 Kings is very much a story of two halves. After demonstrating such faith and courage to confront Ahab and the people and to show God's power, Elijah basically collapses at half time and pretty much has a breakdown. He couldn't take any more. And we see a very different side of Elijah, a very human one. One I would say we can probably identify with more easily than the super-prophet who goes unquestioningly and courageously, that we see in Chapter 18.

1. Elijah was frightened and exhausted (19v3-5)

Doing what God had called him to do had used up everything Elijah had- all his courage, all his faith, all his inner resources. They were all spent. At times doing what God wants can take everything we have (and maybe at times it even feels like more than we have to give)

When Jesus called his followers to take up the cross and follow him, he was indicating a discipleship that is costly and sacrificial. We might not like that, but it is the reality of Christian living.

As Elijah found, following God can be tough.

One of the biggest lies I have ever heard in Christian circles is 'come to Jesus and all your problems will be sorted out-your life will be perfect'

I don't actually think that's true, and I certainly don't think Jesus promised that at any time.

2. Elijah hid from life (19v9)

When it was all too much Elijah crawled into a cave, and I don't reckon he had much intention of getting out again! I suppose our equivalent might be pulling the duvet over our heads and refusing to get out of bed – which does at times seem highly attractive.

It's interesting to see that God let him do that. It's perfectly within God's powers not to have let Elijah have a kip in that cave, but He did, and not only did he let him hide, but he had also provided Elijah with food and water and an angel to look after him while he was running away.

Even as God expects great things from us he continues to provide for us. As I read this passage I am always tempted to burst into song (don't worry I'm not going to) about the steadfast love of the Lord that never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness oh Lord, great is thy faithfulness.

As Elijah was running and hiding because it was all too much, God was still providing and caring for him

3. Elijah didn't want to listen to God (19v14)

When God spoke to Elijah and asked him why he was there, Elijah had a whole list of things ready to bolster his case.

God demonstrated His awesome power in the earthquake, wind and fire and then in the stillness, but when he'd done all that, again Elijah just trotted out his list of complaints. Elijah wasn't yet ready to acknowledge God's greatness, or his power, or to meet with him and listen.

This all sounds worryingly familiar to me ... how often do I trot out a list of complaints to God, and then a bit later cover the same ground again, and then maybe even again, and again ? What have I missed while I'm busy muttering away, unwilling to listen? What has God been doing and saying in that time ?

God wasn't finished with Elijah.

But praise God- he doesn't give up on us. He didn't give up on Elijah and let him stay in hiding. Instead he had a new set of tasks, a new direction for Elijah to follow. God gave him the time to lick his wounds so to speak, but then it was back onto the task in hand.

And maybe there are times when we are tempted to keep hiding even though God wants us to move on to new things

I'd like us now just to take a few moments to be quiet and think about what God might be saying to us.

There are a lot of challenges that have come out of this passage that maybe you want to pray and think through.

Lets be still now and allow God to speak.....

Elijah (1 Kings 18 & 19)

Housegroup notes

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These two chapters demonstrate two very different actions and experiences of Elijah.

In Chapter 18 he responds to God's call, speaks courageously and has great faith in God.

In Chapter 19 Elijah is frightened and exhausted. He runs away to hide, and isn't willing to listen to God.

For discussion

1. In what ways can you identify with Elijah's positive experiences and actions ?
2. How has God spoken to you ? What do you do when God's leading is not clear ?
3. Do you identify at all with Elijah's negative actions ?
4. What things encourage your faith ?