



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Elijah the Prophet

“Prayer Proclamation,” 1 Kings 16:21-17:6 – TRANSCRIPT

[Our] study of the Old Testament prophet Elijah is found in 1 Kings chapter 16, and we’re going to begin reading with verse 21. 1 Kings chapter 16 and verse 21:

“There were the children of Israel divided into two parts. Half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king, and half followed Omri. But the people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni the son of Ginath. So Tibni died and Omri reigned. In the thirty and first year of Asa, King of Judah, began Omri to reign over Israel twelve years. Six years he reigned in Tirzah.”

You’ll remember that we are now in that part of the Bible in which the kingdom of Israel has been divided. There is the southern kingdom, Judah, and the northern kingdom known generally as Israel. And so, we’re reading about the northern kingdom. Elijah was a prophet in the northern kingdom. Verse 24,

“And he bought the hill, Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill and called the name of the city which he built, Shemer, after

the owner of the hill Samaria. But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord and did worse than all that were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jereboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities (vanities are idols). Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and his might that he showed, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel? Omri slept with his fathers and was buried in Samaria, and Ahab, his son, reigned in his stead. And in the thirtieth year of Asa, King of Judah, began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel. And Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel and Samaria twenty and two years. And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass (as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jereboam the son of Nebat) that he took to wife, Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, King of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove (now a grove, most scholars believe, was something like a pole, which was designed in a way to be an idol, representing a goddess), and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho. He laid the foundation thereof with Abiram, his firstborn, and set the gates thereof with his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD which he spake by Joshua, the son of Nun.”

That was a fulfillment of prophecy.

“And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, ‘As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand there shall not be dew

nor rain these years but according to my word.’ And the word of the LORD came unto him saying, ‘Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward and hide thyself by the brook Cherith that is before Jordan.’”

By the way, just for your help in reading the Bible, as I’ve said to you many times, I’m not sure that I know how to pronounce every word in the Old Testament. There are one or two that occasionally slip me. But I know the way to read, and that is to read them as if you understand [laughter] exactly how to pronounce them. Don’t hesitate; for if you hesitate, you are lost, as the Proverb says. But I will give you this little hint. Almost all the words of the Bible that begin with a “C-H” are pronounced like a K. In other words, don’t hesitate. Don’t say, “ch-ch-ch” [laughter]—just say “Kerith.” And it happens to be right in this case and you’ll be right most of the time. Cherith that is before Jordan.

“And it shall be that you shall drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook.”

May God bless this reading from his word. Let’s bow together.

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of meeting in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and bringing our petitions to Thee. We thank Thee for the lessons that we have learned, as we have considered the life of Elijah, that the effectual prayer of a righteous man avails much in its workings.

We do not presume, Lord, to come to Thee as those who are perfectly pure and righteous. We know that we have received righteousness from Thee. And we pray, O God, that this righteousness that we have received from Thee may find its expression in

growth in our daily lives. And may there come to pass in the lives of each one of us that spiritual growth that will enable us to be classified as righteous before Thee.

And we pray that as we come to Thee with our petitions, that Thou wilt answer them in accordance with Thy will. And so, Lord, we come to Thee today and we ask Thy blessing upon this congregation which is before us. We look out over it, Lord, and we know there are many who have great problems, but we know that Thou art a God who answers our prayer.

We sense, Lord, in our audience today, the emphasis of answered prayer. And so we bring our petitions to Thee with confidence and with assurance. Lord, we ask that Thou wouldst meet the needs that exist here. May those who are ill have Thy hand upon them for their good, physically. For those who are troubled, we pray, O God, that Thou would fill their hearts and spirits and give them peace. For those who desire some sure guidance for the immediate future, we pray that Thou would guide them with Thine eye as Thou hast promised in Thy word. And for those, Lord, who may be in sin, we pray that Thou wilt bring to confession with the forgiveness of sin.

We pray for the elders of this assembly that Thou wilt give them wisdom and guidance. And we pray for the many who have an outreach, both personally and as a group. And we ask, O God, that throughout this week, there may be many opportunities given and many come to know Jesus Christ through the testimony of those who are gathered here.

We pray that Thou would will lay upon us continually the burden of those who are without Christ, and may we give ourselves to that. We thank Thee for the many evangelical organizations within Christendom, who faithfully proclaim the word, and we ask for Thy blessing upon them today. Supply their needs. Give them fruit. We pray for every church in which the word of God is ministered, and may today be a day of fruitfulness as the testimony of Christ is proclaimed.

We pray that the Spirit may work in power, and that Thy blessing may rest upon the church of Jesus Christ. And Father we ask also that Thou wilt uncover and discover the evil and the heresy that exists within the Christian camp, and may it be rooted out by Thy grace.

We look to Thee for guidance and direction in all of these matters. We thank Thee for every individual in this audience, and pray, O God, that our lives may be more and more conformed to Thy will for us. And so we commit ourselves to Thee this day for this week. We pray Thy blessing on the ministry of the word that follows.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] You can see a great deal of difference between the first hymn that we sang and the second hymn. And there is no question about the Christianity of Isaac Watts. But notice the second stanza,

“Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast / save in the death of Christ my God.”

He was no Unitarian.

“All the vile things that charm me most / I sacrifice them to his blood.”

By the way, I think Watts was pastor of an independent church [laughter]. In fact, if my memory is correct, it was called The Independent Church. That’s what we think we are.

Now, today, we are beginning a series of studies in the prophet Elijah’s life, and so will you turn with me to the 16th and 17th chapters of 1 Kings? Our subject is Prayer, Proclamation, and Strange Providers.

Elijah was Jehovah’s answer to Baal. He was, apparently, so important in divine revelation that he is mentioned more in the New Testament than any other prophet. As you know, he appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with our Lord Jesus, and

furthermore, it is stated in Scripture that Elijah the prophet shall come again before that great and terrible day of the Lord.

Elijah’s name means, “Jehovah is my God.” And I don’t know how that must have sounded in the days in which Baal became so prominent. I wonder if men looked at Elijah and said, his name is “Jehovah is my God” or “Jehovah is *my* God” as over against the gods of so many of the Israelites that day.

But, at any rate, Elijah is a man who comes with almost super-human powers. He’s a man who seems to be a citizen not of the ordinary earth in which we live, but almost a retainer of God’s kingdom and God’s throne and God’s court in heaven. He was a rugged, stern, solitary man who was called by his commentators, a prophet of fire.

And yet, he is likened unto Jesus Christ in the New Testament. When the Lord Jesus asked his disciples, whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? They said, “Some say you’re the Prophet. Some say you’re Jeremiah. Some say you are Elijah.” So there must have been some things about Jesus Christ that parallel the life of Elijah in the Old Testament.

Now, we often think of Jesus as meek and lowly in heart, only. Now, he was that. But he was also extremely inflexible in his holiness. In fact, if he had not been holy, he could not have gained our souls by his sacrifice on the cross. If he was not just and righteous himself, he could not have been our Savior. And so that sternness and ruggedness that existed in the prophet Elijah also existed in our Lord Jesus Christ, and men saw that there was something similar about the two.

When we look at Elijah, we remember that God is never through with great men. We look about us in the 20th Century, and we think of men like Winston Churchill. Where would we have been without Winston Churchill? Or some of us may think of Douglas MacArthur. Where would we have been without Douglas MacArthur? Or even if we look at the bad men of the 20th Century, we come to the conclusion, since it is God in the final analysis who is responsible for the men who sit on the thrones of earthly kingdoms, that

there’s some way in which men like Kruschev and Stalin and Trotsky and others have served the purpose of God, too.

The worst times, however, demand the best men. And times were very bad in Israel when Elijah the Prophet came on the scene. In Ahab’s day there was need for a man to arrive who would not give Israel new theology, but who would simply declare the ancient theology and reaffirm its great principles in the ears of people who had forgotten them. That is the kind of day in which we live today. We do not need more theology in the 20th Century. We certainly do not need new theology. We do not need the kind of new theology that so many are forced to hear today. We need more faith in the theology that we already have in the word of God.

Charles Kingsley said that he did not merely want to possess a faith, but he wanted a faith that would possess him. And Kingsley’s words are certainly appropriate today. For today is a day in which we need as Christians to lay hold of, in a deeper way than we ever have before, the faith that we have as represented in the word of God.

Let’s look this morning first at the circumstances of the appearance of this remarkable prophet. Israel was at a crisis, and Elijah comes as the harbinger of reform and recovery.

Ahab’s reign was a reign of wealth and splendor. After all, he succeeded the great Omri. Now Omri does not appear in the Bible as a great man, but if you went to the annals of the Assyrian kings you would discover that for 100 years they would refer to Israel as the “House of Omri.” He was a great man, historically. In the word of God, of course, we read that Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord and did worse than all that were before him. But in his day he was a great man. Men looked off to his kingship and they spoke highly of his ability as a world figure and as a ruler in the little land of Palestine.

Now Ahab succeeded him, and the Bible says that Ahab was a man who walked in the sins of Jereboam the son of Nebat. It was Jereboam remember, who was the first

king of the northern kingdom. Now Jereboam did not do things that might have seemed really bad to us if we had lived in that day. He had been brought up in Egypt, and he had been acquainted with the Egyptian gods, and when he became king all he did was simply introduce the worship of Jehovah by means of the Egyptian gods. He didn’t deny the worship of Jehovah. He just brought up some calves and set up worship at Dan in the north and Bethel in the south, and then he made the figures of the calves and he said, “These be the gods that brought thee out of Egypt.”

And if you had gone to Jereboam and said, Jereboam, are you denying the worship of Jehovah, he would have said, “Oh no, this is just a different way in which we worship the same god. After all, in the final analysis, the Babylonians and the Egyptians and others were all worshipping the same god. I do not deny Jehovah. I am a worshipper of Jehovah. I just think that we ought to put other gods alongside of him, and we can understand him better through them.” There are many today who feel like that. They feel that alongside the Trinity of Christianity it is perfectly alright to worship other gods: the gods of the Hindus or the gods of the Mohammedians or the gods of the Taoists or whatever it may be.

But the word of God says that Jereboam was one who made Israel to sin. Because, you see, the God who is the genuine and true God is an exclusive God, and he does not want you to give his glory to anyone else, for it is wrong. It is not only wrong but is sinful and evil and it always produces evil, too. For, you see, men live like their gods. “Them that make them are like unto them” the Psalmist said. And God knew that when the worship of Jehovah was abandoned, and that other gods were worshipped, who were not holy gods like Jehovah, the people would soon become unholy.

And that is exactly what happened. Baal worship came into the land. Baal was the god of fertility, and so there were Baals for everything. And ultimately, an order to express the worship of the god Baal, the most lascivious kinds of rites were engaged in.

And even children were sacrificed to the fire in worship of Baal. False gods always lead to evil and immorality.

Now that’s looking at it only naturally. But God spoke out very strongly against the gods that Jereboam allowed to come in and particularly Ahab. But Ahab’s greatest mistake was in the wife that he took. This is something that happens in the 20th Century, sad to say. I know of some men, of whom it can be said, that the greatest mistake that they have ever made is in the wife that they have taken.

Ahab, apparently for political reasons, married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, a priest who usurped the throne of Sidon, or Tyre. And this Tyrian princess was a very unscrupulous woman. She was the Simeramis of her age. She was cruel. And furthermore, she was lustful. And above all else, she was implacably hostile to the worship of Jehovah. She wanted the gods of Baal to be the gods of the lands of Israel. So it was necessary for God to act.

And a man appeared on the scene whose name was “Jehovah is my God.” And you can understand why Elijah was given that name. Clarence McCartney says that Elijah was the loneliest and grandest man in the Old Testament. He is man of thunder and lightning, of fire and whirlwind. And that name that was given to him expresses the bent of his ministry: “Jehovah is my God!” Not Baal, not the gods of fertility. Jehovah, the ever-living God, the covenant-keeping God; this God is my God.

You know, it would be wonderful if today, in the day in which we live, some men would stand up and say, “Jesus Christ is my God!” like Isaac Watts did. I believe in the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and the atonement through Jesus Christ. For when a man stands like that, God is free to move supernaturally. And he did in the life of Elijah.

It states that Elijah was of Tishbe, in the land of Gilead. Now, Gilead was to the east of Jordan, and that’s a wild, rugged, rocky region. In Elijah’s day it was the home of nomadic hillbillies. And so, the sovereignly chosen “Balm from Gilead” was not a

professor. Professors are good in their place; unfortunately they don’t always stay in their place. [Laughter] He was not a reverend; reverends are almost never good. As Spurgeon said, “Why should we steal an attribute that belongs only to God?” But for those genuine men of God who don’t like to be called reverend, they have their place, too. Elijah was just a man who grew up out in the sticks, so to speak, but he had an opportunity to come to know God.

And he did come to know God; he came to know him in a very intimate way. In fact, all of the priests and religious men of that day, apparently, did not know God as Elijah did. Oh, there were other prophets. There was Obadiah. There were 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. But Elijah is the man who stands out above the rest, and he was just a man who came from the hill country.

Furthermore, he had some things going against him, too. He had some things going for him, but some things were going against him. In the second book of Kings, it is stated that he was an hairy man with a girdle of leather about his loins, and that was his name, Elijah the Tishbite. Imagine, a hippie who has come to the help of Israel. [Laughter]. I wonder what Ahab thought when he saw Elijah striding up, and he saw this hairy man with this girdle about him and a mantle thrown around his shoulders. He must have turned to one of his aides and said, you know, this fellow looks like a great big bug that’s coming—[laughter]—a Beetle to be exact—and then as he looked at Elijah, he must have said, “Say, you’re about 2,000 years before your time, bubba.” [Laughter] But he soon discovered that Elijah’s message wasn’t “yeah, yeah, yeah,” but “no, no, no!” [Loud, sustained laughter]

Apparently – by the way, did you know that the Hebrew text says, where it says he was an hairy man, it says he was “lord of hair”—just a Hebrew expression. He was *ba’al se’ar* (ba’al means “lord”)—he was the master of hair. Boy, he would be popular in the 20th Century, wouldn’t he?

He had a mantle which he threw around his shoulders. Now apparently, that mantle had something to do with the prophetic office. In fact, [Johnson laughs] as so often happens you know, Elijah began a trend. And the trend was afterwards for the prophets to have a hairy garment, because they wanted to walk in the line of Elijah. As you’ll remember in Zechariah, when we were going through it recently, in the thirteenth chapter and the fourth verse we read, “And it shall come to pass in that day that the prophets shall be ashamed, everyone, of his vision, which he hath prophesied, neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive. In other words, apparently from the time of Elijah, the prophets liked—I imagine the prophets had long hair, they had a girdle about their loins, and they threw a mantle around their shoulders in order that you could look off and say, now there’s a prophet.

Now, I’m not going to say all I’m going to say about this, but I just want to make this comment, maybe two comments. Number one, that it always is human—when God brings his hand upon a man, uses that man, raises him up and speaks to people through that man—the person who has no spiritual discernment or little spiritual discernment will look at him and evaluate his effectiveness by his outward appearance. In other words, today you can look on the street and say, well, there’s the Reverend Dr. so-and-so; there’s the Reverend Dr. such-and-such. We don’t know him, but there are the signs. But often, there is no reality – sometimes there is – but often there is no reality.

Now, to get right down to the mundane, we had a great preacher in Dallas for many years. His name was Truett. I think anybody who has known Jesus Christ honors the name of Dr. Truett, who was for many years pastor of the First Baptist Church in this city. He was a man who was a great preacher. He had a great heart. And God greatly used him. Now, I don’t want to say anything against Mr. Truett, because I’m a great admirer of his. But I do know this, that Mr. Truett, when he went into the pulpit, he went into the pulpit and he usually put his hands on the pulpit desk like this with one foot forward and one foot back, and he preached. And he preached with great power. And

you would not have been surprised if you had known spiritual truth if, twenty years later, you had gone into the Baptist churches over the South and discovered that man after man went into the pulpit, put two hands on the pulpit desk with one foot forward [laughter] and began to preach. But they were not Truetts. They were not Truetts, at least a great number of them.

You see, men often look at the outward and think that the power rests there. It does not. Elijah had a mantle, but it had no great significance other than it was God and Elijah, symbolic of the unction that was upon him. And of course, when God came, and through Elijah smote the waters with his mantle and Elisha took the mantle, it was a symbolic thing only to indicate that God’s power now rested with his scholar and successor, Elisha.

Now, the texts also say about Elijah that he “troubled Israel.” Now, of course, that’s from the viewpoint of Ahab. He met him one day and said, “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” And how often that, too, is the response of men? It is not the man of God who troubles Israel; it is the ungodly king who troubles Israel. But it is necessary for God to stir up the people. And so, in reaction against the word of God we say, “Aren’t thou he that troubleth Israel?” I would gather from this that Elijah was not that tactful, polite, courteous kind of man that never gives a forthright message at all. I would gather from this that he was fearless. I would gather from this that if it is necessary for him to be tactless, in order for him to be true to the word of God, he will be tactless.

I would imagine that he was a John Knox kind of man. At John Knox’s funeral, when Regent Morton was giving some words of eulogy, he uttered what Gaddis MacGregor has called, “The ineffaceable words about John Knox”: “Here lies a man who neither slaughtered nor feared any flesh.” I think Elijah was that kind of man. And that’s what a great change occurred in Israel through Elijah. He wasn’t afraid to speak out from what he saw in the word of God.

James tells us that he was righteous. Bill McCrae has expounded the significance of that well this morning. It also says in James that he was a man of like passions with us. I think that means that he was not only fearless, but on occasions he was fearful. He was not only a shaggy lion, but he was also a frightened little bird at times. He not only was a hawk, but occasionally he was a dove in moments of weakness. He was rough, and at the same time he was tender. Mendelssohn has caught Elijah’s character very well in his *Elijah* with its rapid alternations – well that was Elijah.

Now Elijah appeared one day in the court of Ahab. Time was right for reproof. There was needed someone to take up the watch word, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one lord, and thou shalt worship the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul.” For Israel has gone after Baal. And there are gods on almost every mill. And these gods are gods which represent fertility, for Baal was the fertility god. And it was the claim of the Baalites that their gods were responsible for all the blessings that came from heaven. Baal brought the rain. Baal brought the sun. Baal brought the fruitfulness of their crops. Baal was responsible for their prosperity.

And so, a thunderbolt one day crashed in Ahab’s court one day when this hairy beetle, this bug, this hairy prophet came in in front of the king and said to the king, “As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word.” Now the Bible does not say anything about the kinds of effects that this had upon the court and upon Ahab. I just imagine that they were thunderstruck, because after all this was a bolt of lightning and a crash of thunder that had come. I would imagine that their mouths opened and they stood looking. Imagine the audacity of someone coming in the court of Israel in Jezreel in his very palace and standing before him and uttering these words. But he did it.

Did you notice from this first verse that there is a clue to Elijah’s living. The text says that Elijah was of the inhabitants of Gilead. He was from the little village of Tishbe, or Tishbe. Now, I would assume that since almost all the villages east of the Jordan were

just little tents, collections of tents, that he was really a nomad. But he was from that area. That’s where he lived. But really, Elijah did not live in Tishbe. He lived in the presence of God. Did you notice that? “As the LORD God who liveth, before whom I stand;” that means, before whom I minister; that means, whose servant I am. Oh I live in Tishbe, but I live in heaven, before God.

That’s what Paul means when he addresses the Colossians and the saints “which are at Colossae” but adds that they are also “in Christ.” For you see, every one of us lives in two spheres. The trouble with so many of us from the 20th Century is that we live primarily “in Dallas” instead of “in Christ.” But if we lived in Christ as much as we lived in Dallas, what a tremendous change would occur in Dallas! That’s what happened in Israel. So, the man comes.

And if you would have looked on that little court, you would have probably been amazed. You would have said, my, look at Ahab, isn’t that a wonderful garment in which he is dressed? It’s a long, flowing, expensive, gold be-decked robe. And that beautiful room with all of the tapestry, and the architecture of this palace, and all of the corporas— isn’t this a magnificent place?

And then this hairy man comes in. [Laughter] And talks about a God in heaven. You know have you ever looked at mountains when the mists are covering them? I lived in Switzerland for a time, and often in Switzerland, the mists cover the high mountains, and if you were to go out driving, you would look at the little hills. Oh, they would be mountains in Texas, but they’re really little hills over there. And they’re beautiful little hills. And you admire them, and you talk about their beauty until, in a moment, the wind comes and the mist is whipped away from those gigantic skyscrapers and your breath is taken away as you see the beauty that had been hidden. And that’s the way it was the day Elijah came into the court of Ahab. If you had looked at the court and marveled at that, you would have been like a man marveling at the beauty of the little hills. But when Elijah came in, the breath, the wind came and the mist was blown away and they got a

look at the God of heaven, who sets up a new throne that is above all thrones. And the others pale in insignificance by it.

There shall not only be no rain—dew nor rain—but according to my word. You follow Baal. He’s the god of the rain. We shall see who is the god of the rain. Let the god that answereth by rain be the true God. In the next chapter you’ll see, let the god that answereth by fire be the true God. And so now he has challenged them. He has challenged the gods of Baal: produce your rain. There’s not going to be any rain except according to my word.

We were treated to a series of lectures last year, or the year before at Dallas Seminary by William Ward Ayre. He referred to this in one of messages. He said that when Elijah came in, he spoke very sharply to the king. And he said he once heard Billy Sunday preach on this, and that Billy Sunday said, that after he said, ‘as the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word,’ that Billy Sunday stopped and said, he also said to Ahab, ‘And Ahab, to explain that, I want to tell you that it’s going to be so dry that you’re going to have to prime yourself before you’re able to spit.’ [Laughter] Now that is not in holy Scripture. But Billy Sunday’s exposition for some time’s not really holy, either. But anyway, at any rate, Ahab has been challenged, and Ahab’s god has been challenged. And I just wonder what happened as Elijah turned around, with all the dignity of the prophet of God and walked out of the presence of Ahab, I wonder if he finally recovered his courage, and as Elijah was making his retreat, he yells out, “Stop that man!” But nobody does anything. I think the fear of God had fallen upon the court of Ahab.

Because, you see, when the man of God speaks up, when the man of God proclaims the word of God, there is always something that accompanies it. And there is something that accompanies it that makes the hearts of men like water. And you know what it is? It’s the power of God. The power of God. For when the gospel of Christ is proclaimed, it is proclaimed with the power of God. And that is why we stand for him.

We can always be sure that we have God’s power behind us. That’s why we know, in Believer’s Chapel, that as long as we stick to the pages of holy Scripture, and proclaim his word, we have God’s power. It is guaranteed to us by God. And we know it from his word. We just need to live before the God who lives for a while, like Elijah did.

Well, now the word of the Lord came to Elijah again: Elijah, it’s time to hide. And I can understand that. I think God is very practical. This man has suddenly become enemy number one, the public enemy #1 in all the land of Israel. The word is out: get Elijah! And the person behind this is the queen, but the people are not happy, either. Because, you see, the rain does not come. Their crops do not become ripe. The grass begins to turn brown. The cattle begin to low for water, and there is no water. They look at the streams, and the streams begin to dry up. The rivers are dry. And it’s all because of the Prophet of Jehovah, Elijah. They hate him, so it’s time to hide.

And so Elijah hides. But of course, from Elijah’s standpoint, there was a reason for this. It’s only in the times of hiding that we really come to know God. I was reading somewhere, not long ago, that no spiritual discovery is ever made on a crowded street. So Elijah goes to the east of Jordan, to little brook Cherith, and it must have been in a rocky, out-of-the-way place. And he sat down by that little brook, because God had said that he commanded the ravens to feed him. And there he listened to the voice of God. He came to know God better. He came to understand something about the next steps that God would do for him, and the things that God would do through him.

And he was fed. But, you know, this was a tremendous act of faith. God had said to him, “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.” Do you know anything about ravens? Well, you know the word, ravenous, don’t you? A ravenous eater? Have you ever seen a ravenous eater? Well, come over to my house when I miss a meal sometime. [Laughter] I become like a raven. A raven is known for the fact that he can eat tremendous amounts of food. In fact, if you feed ravens – I don’t recommend it – but if you do, you’re liable to be feeding them your hand.

Now to think that the ravens would come to give him food, Elijah must have said, [clears throat] “What did you say? *Oravim?* Or did you not mean, Arabians? That’s the way the modern scholars read that. The Arabians were going to come and feed him. And you’re not—listen, that would have been a bigger miracle! [Laughter] Imagine the Arabians coming in the morning and the evening and feeding the prophet of Israel. [More laughter] That’s what the modern scholars want us to read, here. No, that’s ravens. Elijah must have said in his heart, ravens, of all animals; ravens, why, they won’t leave me a thing. But no, God had said ravens.

Furthermore, Elijah might have reasoned, well, the brook is going to dry up there, too, isn’t it? And in addition, the raven was an unclean bird according to the Old Testament. But the ravens were going to come by and visit him in the morning and the evening and give him bread and flesh.

25th verse says so he went and did according to the word of the Lord – that’s the thing you do. You see, it becomes a much greater miracle when the ravens come and do it, and that’s what happens. And furthermore, did you notice that God said, I have commanded the ravens to feed thee *there?* There. I’m quite sure that Elijah was right by that brook every morning and every evening. He didn’t say, “Now boys, this afternoon I’m going to be out in the field playing a little baseball. Meet me over there and give me some food along about the regular time.” No, he knew that God had said he would be fed right there, right at that spot. And so he was sure to be at that spot.

Now of course, the lesson is obvious. When we are at the center of God’s will, we can be sure of his provision. But we cannot be sure of his provision when we’re out of his will. The food will be at the right spot. Did you notice in the Old Testament, when Israel was led through the wilderness by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, did you notice this about the manna? It followed the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire. That’s where the manna was. That’s quite an incentive to follow the pillar, by the way. And so

the prophet obeys in faith, and he is fed. He is given daily bread for daily strength. And this is God’s promise.

Many years ago, there was a great preacher, in Mr. Wesley’s day. His name was Sam Bradburn. And Mr. Wesley, word came to Mr. Wesley that Sammy was not doing so well at one time, financially, and so Mr. Wesley sent him a five pound note. And with the money he enclosed a little word. He said, “Dear Sammy, trust in the Lord and do good. So shalt thou dwell in the land and verily thou shalt be fed. Yours affectionately, John Wesley.” Shortly after, he received a prompt thank you note in which Mr. Bradburn said, “Dear Mr. Wesley. I’ve often been struck with the beauty of the passage of Scripture, which you have just quoted. But, I must confess that I never saw such useful expository notes on it before.” [Laughter] No, when a man obeys God, he will be supplied, provisioned by God. And so Elijah spent many, many days by the brook Cherith, and he listened, and he learned.

Now in conclusion, this morning, I want to call your attention to just a couple of lessons which are quite obvious, but one of them I want to spend about two minutes on. First of all, it’s obvious that error has an insidious power. In spite of the stringent admonitions of the Old Testament that they were not to have such gods as the gods of Baal, Israel still went out and constructed their gods and followed the false idols.

Now today we are not in danger of pagan idolatry, I don’t think. We’re not in danger of the superstition that mark some of our professing Christian churches. But we are, today, in danger of human reason. The Christian faith is imminently reasonable, provided we have begun with faith. But, we are in danger today of falling prey to new theology; new ideas concerning the person of Christ; new ideas concerning the atonement; new ideas concerning the word of God, in which the word of God is partly iron and partly clay, like Nebuchadnezzar’s image; new ideas concerning Christian morality. We’re not in danger of the other things, but we are in danger of these.

And of course, this text speaks of the triumph of faith and the triumph of faith for the glory of God. For the one who gets the glory through all of this is God. And I think it’s very important to remember that the day is coming when our lives are going to be judged by the fruit of our lives. And I think it’s important for every one of us as believers in Christ – and of course, if we’re not believers, the first step is to put our trust in Christ – it’s very important for us to measure our lives against the will of God.

Omri was a great king; if you would have lived in Omri’s day, you would have said, he’s a great man. He’s one of the great leaders of the age—a man of tremendous ability. You would have been amazed and astounded at him, no doubt. But the Scripture says hardly a few words about him—just a few words about him—and it says he did evil in the sight of the Lord. And if you’d looked at Ahab, you’d have admired the beauty of his court. You would have admired the beauty of Jezebel. There would have been many noble things about this great man to comment upon, but in the word of God it is, he did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than the kings before him.

Now, what will be said about your life? She was a raving beauty. He was a tremendous business success. He was a man who came up from nothing and made millions. Or he was a tremendous scholar, great intellect. Or even, he was a great preacher. But when God writes his little epitaph, will it be, “He did evil in the sight of the Lord.”

Now the final thing. You know, James – and Bill McCrae brought this out so well this morning – James says that Elijah was a man of prayer. As a matter of fact, James says something that the writer of Hebrews does not tell us. James says, “He prayed that it did not rain, and it did not rain.” I’ve often wondered about that, because the text here suggests that God just said to him it’s not going to rain, and go tell Ahab that. But I don’t really think that’s what happened.

Do you know what I think happened? I think Elijah looked off and he saw on the hills the idols of Baal, and then he turned to God and he said, “God, this nation is in

idolatry. This nation has fallen prey to the heresy of baalism. This nation has begun to backslide. This nation has abandoned Thee. And God, from the teaching of holy Scriptures, from Deuteronomy chapter 11, which I have been meditating upon, out in the wilds and wastes east of Jordan, you have said in your word that when Israel departs from you, one of the stages of divine discipline is that you are going to shut the heavens. When I look around here, the heavens are not shut. It’s raining, and people are prosperous, and yet they have departed from Thee. O God, why?!”

And God spoke to the prophet. He said, “Elijah, I’ve been looking for a man just like you. I’ve been looking for a man who will study Scripture and will pray in the light of it. And I want you to know that the iniquity of the Israelites has reached its fullness. And the time has come for the carrying out of that discipline. And so, Elijah, you are my messenger to carry out word that I am beginning my discipline set forth in the word of God.” And so Elijah went, not just with the word of God – the word of God in his ears – but the word of God in his hands. And he knew that this was God’s already prophesied discipline. And he went in that it was the assurance of God’s will, and he spoke, and God responded.

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. And I think he went off to the brook Cherith, and he said, now, Lord, do in accordance with your word. Do in accordance with Moses’ words and the words you have spoken to me. And he saw God’s word come to pass.

Oh, the importance of supplication and solitude. Solitude. And I think this morning if one person in this audience will say before God I want to be a man who will spend some time with God, it has been worthwhile. May God speak to your heart, for Jesus’ sake. Let’s stand for the Benediction.

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we are so grateful to Thee for the faithfulness of the prophet, and we’re so glad that he was a man of like passions with us.

Oh God, give us the desire to know Thee and to be used of Thee. And again,
Lord, if there should be someone present who does not know Thee, give them no rest
nor peace till they turn to the one who has died for them.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.