



HG201: Elijah & Elisha 'Standing For God' **Keep On Running**

1 Kings 19:1-18

Home Group Study Notes

14 June 2020 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins) *Ice Breaker*

The House Group questions this week are different than usual. Please read these through in advance and complete questions 2 to 5 before your Home Group is due to meet.



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG201: Elijah & Elisha 'Standing For God' Keep On Running

1 Kings 19:1-18

Home Group Sermon

14 June 2020 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction

Tabloids thrive on it; glossy magazines depend on it and we all get caught up in it one way or another. In fact, it seems that it's become something of a national past time. What am I referring to? 'Digging for dirt!' Prying into people's lives in order to unearth some sordid secret or a flaw in character which will only go to show that the rich and famous are just like us. Social media calls it trolling and we've seen the tragic consequences of that far too often in recent times. But it isn't the sole domain of the media is it? Why is that? Perhaps it feeds our insatiable appetite for gossip – or information! Social media can be a blessing and a scourge on our society.

The British are renowned for building up their heroes in order to destroy them afterwards and enjoy doing so in the process. But if that's the case, we should at least make sure we get our facts right about the person to ensure a proper and true comparison is being made rather than engaging in character assassination. All of this, I believe, applies to Elijah in 1 Kings 19.

1. Running Away vs1-3

After the victory of Mount Carmel when, by the miracle of fire and rain, Baal worship is finally exposed as empty and meaningless. King Ahab reported everything which took place to Jezebel - and you can be sure he wouldn't have spared any detail. It was impressive, it was spectacular, nothing had ever been seen like it before.

The call from Mount Carmel was for Israel to return wholeheartedly to the worship of the one true God, but it is quite clear from Jezebel's response that this was not going to happen. She wore the trousers in this relationship and what she said, went. Nothing has significantly changed in the life of Israel. There was no constitutional turn around; no cabinet reshuffle; no opening of the treasury to provide funds for the reinstatement of the prophets; no call for a national day of prayer and penitence. Nothing.

Elijah, who stood up to a King and 400 hostile religious leaders now cowers at the threats of Jezebel, who had just been breathing threats in vs2 which she communicated to Elijah by a messenger *'May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like one of them.'* As a result, Elijah was scared witless and does a runner, vs3. It hardly seems to be same person does it? Elijah may have been sorely tested, emotionally wasted and in deep anguish, but it's not the Elijah we've come to know.

But the reason he ran away, it seems to me, was not so much to preserve his life because in vs4 he asks *God* to take his life, rather it was so that he would not die at the hands of Jezebel for that *would* have marked a final victory for her evil ways. Could it be that Elijah acted out of concern for God's honour? After all he says: *'I have been zealous for the Lord.'* Yes, God had every right to take away his life, if Elijah that he had failed in his mission: Israel had not turned back. But he would not allow Jezebel that privilege of killing him in order to strengthen her political position. This is more likely to be the explanation for Elijah's flight and this is backed up by where he ran to - Beersheba.

This is about 100 miles south of Jezreel, well outside the reach of Jezebel's clutches. Horeb is 200 miles further south. In 1 Kings 17:3, God told Elijah where to run. This time he's running on his own. So, let us follow Elijah on his journey, as we see:

2. The Provision of God vs4-9a

Elijah does appear to be a broken man, doesn't he? He went into the desert - always the place of testing and death - sat under a broom tree (hoping it might sweep away his sorrows - get it?) and prayed: *'I have had enough LORD, take my life I am no better than my ancestors.'* He feels that he has tried everything, at least let his life end nobly by the one who gives and takes away. He feels an utter failure. He is exhausted, understandably so, physically and emotionally and so he falls asleep. But what does the LORD do? Rebuke him? Tell him to snap out of it and recover some of the Carmel spirit? Some of us might expect that to have happened. "We can't have defeated Christians, after all, that lets the side down you know - its a bad witness. We have to be living in the Victory!" There is often no place for quiet reflection, penitence - everything must be upbeat, spectacular and triumphant. And so, the Christian often has no option but to put on a mask, sing their worship songs and not play the hypocrite.

But look at the tenderness in how God treats Elijah, vs5 *'All at once an angel touched him. Get up and eat'* he says. Elijah looked around and there was a cake of bread baked over hot coals - warm food, and a jug of water to drink. There is a wonderful verse in Hebrews 1:14 that says: *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.* And, in this case, the angel was certainly ministering to Elijah.

It's interesting to see how God's provision is so different from that in ch17. Then, the Ravens brought food for Elijah, here, it is a hot meal, not cooked by some celebrity chef, but by an angel of the Lord. God acknowledges what we often do not, namely, that we are *whole* beings: *body, mind and spirit* and that these are so inextricably woven together that one affects the other. In these conditions Elijah doesn't need a counsellor he needs a chef. It is not a time for prayer it's a time for rest. How often do we look for spiritual causes to our problems when they are physical? Sometimes we just need to listen to our bodies when we feel weary and worn out.

God is not in a hurry to get his patient out of bed before he is ready, vs7: *'the angel of the Lord came back a second time, touched him and said, 'Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you'.* Strengthened by the food, Elijah travelled 40 days and 40 nights until he reaches Horeb, the mountain of God, and spent the night in a cave. The angel anticipates the journey to Horeb, which seems to suggest that far from running away from God and his mission, as some would say, he is running *to* God and his mountain where he enters:

3. The Presence of God vs9b-14

What is implied by the question we see in vs9 and repeated in v13, when God says: *'What are you doing here, Elijah?'* Is this some sort of rebuke? That is: *'What are you doing here when you should be someone else?'* Or is God signalling a different message? Given what surrounds these verses I want to suggest that far from being a slap on the wrists it is, in fact, an invitation for Elijah to put his case before God. The stress is on the word, 'here' what are you doing *here*, Elijah? Where is that 'here'? It is Horeb, or, as it is better known, Sinai. 400 years before, Moses himself stood in a cave, maybe this very cave where Elijah stood, in order to intercede for God's people who had broken his covenant and worshipped a golden calf. Moses stayed on that Mountain for 40 days and 40 nights, the same figures used here in vs8, praying that God would forgive the people's idolatry. And during that time, he was given a unique experience of God's presence (read Exodus 33 - 34).

It's a reminder to us how God's people make the same mistakes time and again and how often God's prophets make the same intercessions on our behalf time and again. The lessons of the past always need to be reapplied for every generation.

I'm reminded of the ditty by the poet Steve Turner: *History repeats itself; it has to - no one listens.*

'What are you doing *here*, Elijah?' The place where the *covenant* was broken and renewed, where I declared myself to be a compassionate God but who nonetheless would not leave the guilty unpunished. This is the right place to be, Elijah if you are going to plead your cause, present your case before me.'

Vs10: *I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty ... I am the only one left.* How many of us have felt alone, as if no-one cared? Feeling God to be absent during the hard times in our lives is not unusual or even un-Christian. God's love often gets hidden away under all the emotions we experience. But His love doesn't change, or go away, just because we may feel angry and frustrated - it's always there. It's interesting to see how God just let Elijah talk and talk and talk. Not once did God suggest to Elijah that he should feel differently or try to talk some sense into him. And, when he did talk with him, he did so gently. God knew Elijah's needs, his fragility, his need just to be able to express himself and be handled with care. And the way God treated Elijah is the way he treats us too.

Did Elijah speak in an angry or resigned voice to God? '*I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant.*' Like Moses, confesses the people's failure to keep that covenant. And maybe, just as with Moses, God would hear the plea of his servant and not abandon his people entirely. And what is the sign of God's covenant blessing? It is that he is *present* with his people. As he was present by the cloud and the pillar of fire as the Israelites came out of Egypt, as he was present in the cloud of glory in the Tabernacle and the fire of glory in the temple. God signalled his presence at Carmel, but it was largely ignored.

So, in his kindness God promises Elijah that *he* will see God's presence just as Moses did. But how? Where will God be found? We then have this amazing account of what is called a 'theophany'- an appearance of God. There is the shattering of the earth, there is the tumultuous blowing of the wind, there is the blinding effects of the fire, but God was *not* in any of these. These were more like fanfares preceding the coming of God, but they were not to be identified with God himself.

Some Christians suggest that if we are going to persuade a sceptical generation, God too must turn up to our meetings in the wild and the spectacular, the strange and bizarre, *then* people will believe. Maybe you thought that when we looked at the Carmel passage a few weeks ago, 'That is just what Billericay needs! A ball of fire on the High Road is bound to make people in our town think again.' Well, the spiritual pyrotechnics of Carmel puts paid to that idea doesn't it?

Signs and wonders may *confirm* faith, but they cannot *produce* faith. Something else is needed. Real spiritual power lies elsewhere. Here, God is to be found *communicating* vs12 in: 'a gentle whisper' or the 'still small voice of calm' as the hymn writer put it. The reality is that we don't do silent reflection very well, do we? Yes, it's easy to praise and celebrate, but we so often shy away from the silence.

This still small voice of calm is not some inner mystical voice, it is something which comes to Elijah externally as did the earth, wind and fire, but it is something, which transcends all these things. This is the voice of God Elijah is hearing, as Moses heard God speak on this Mountain so does Elijah. And when that voice spoke it didn't boom, it didn't shout, he experienced it as a gentle whisper. God makes a real difference in the lives of His people by the gentle whisper of his Word.

As Jesus himself said, an evil and perverse generation looks for a sign, but no sign was to be given but that of the prophet Jonah. And what was that sign? He preached a message of repentance and faith to a pagan city Nineveh and they *believed*. It is through the 'foolishness of what is preached', says the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1, that God is pleased to save those who believe. If we really want to *know* God, experience his presence, then it is to his living Word we must come. It may seem unspectacular, we may prefer the impressive noises and sights of the spiritual fireworks, but God is not there - He comes to his people in the way he always comes to his people, by his Word,

which is to be believed and obeyed.

Do you remember what happened after Moses had experienced a theophany like this one? He came down this mountain carrying the two tablets of the law, God's Word, The Ten Commandments, written on stone by the finger of God. This was to be a testimony to God's people of his love and faithfulness - we worship a God who says what he means and means what he says. Like Elijah, we may look around us and see a society, which is literally hell bent on its own destruction; a church committed to compromise, and we wonder if there is any future.

We may wonder/pray about how this will ever change, but the message here is that there is only one place we are to look to, and that is God and only one place we are to turn to, his Word, that still small voice which endures for ever. I need this book to keep me believing and going on for another week, because life can be pretty wearing at times can't it? And the amazing thing is that God's voice still speaks from these pages telling me he has not changed, that his purposes have not changed, He is the same yesterday, today and forever. This reminds us we can have confidence in:

4. The Promise of God vs15-18

Isn't it wonderful that God is more faithful (stubborn?) than his people? Despite Jezebel's threats, it is He and not her who will have the last word. He will appoint a new King and provide a new prophet in Elisha. It is He who has secretly been at work holding in reserve 7,000 others who have remained faithful. The promise of his *Word*. Even in today's world, real worshippers may be in the minority, but don't be misled by numbers.

Before the day of Pentecost there weren't that many followers of Jesus. Now there are countless millions throughout the world. Tyrants like Ahab come and go, but they will never win in the *long* run. The church has often had to face dark days as in the time of Elijah when those in power are set on the destruction of God's people and, in some cases, enforcing the worship of another god. But God is faithful and keeps his promises.

Elijah began his journey by running away but ended up running into God's perfect presence.

And Finally ...

I wonder where you are on your journey of faith right now. You might be experiencing your Mount Horeb for the first time and God is doing amazing things in your life. You might be in a wrestling match with God. Maybe you have been faithful, and you are disappointed, and you are experiencing your own 40 days of searching. You might be wondering when God is going to show up.

The answer is that he's in all of it. And remember God will provide for you and make His presence known to you and He lives in the promise of renewing all things. His mercies are new every morning. It is up to us to trust in His faithfulness and compassion and listen for the gentle whisper of His voice.

Emmanuel Church Text for 2020

*“The Lord Your God is with you. He is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with
His love. He will rejoice over you with singing.”*

Zephaniah 3:17



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. Spend some time briefly recapping on Sunday's sermon, focusing on the themes of needing time out to recharge and God knowing, and meeting, our needs – along with any other 'themes' that really spoke to you.

2. If it's a fine evening, try some of the following suggestions outside: Why not go out for a walk to the park, (or a similar environment, such as sitting in the garden, or walking round your neighbourhood) on your own, and take a pencil and paper with you on which to jot down responses to the following (If it isn't fine, try to meet somewhere where people can find a bit of private space).

3. Spend some time praying and expressing to God how you're feeling. You may find it helpful to write a poem or a letter or? You may be feeling great, in which case express that, but if you aren't, don't be afraid to be honest with yourself (and with God - who knows your heart, anyway!).

4. Try and give God a chance to speak to you. If you're outside, keep a look out for things in nature that speak something of God. Don't forget that God speaks in silence and through the ordinary as well as the spectacular.

5. Thomas Merton, in his book 'Thoughts In Solitude' wrote: *We put words between ourselves and things. Even God has become another conceptual unreality in a no-man's land of language that no longer serves as a means of communication with reality ... Silence teaches us to know reality by respecting it where words have defiled it.* Discuss this quote in the light of Paul's sermon and the exercises you've just shared in.

6. Spend some time back together in your group, sharing where appropriate what God has been saying to you.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD

P 01277 632120 **E** emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org **WA** EmmanuelCM12

T @EmmanuelCM12 **W** emmanuel-church.info **FB** [EmmanuelChurchBillericay](#)

Part of The Billericay & Little Burstead Team Ministry