

The Lord and the Crushed in Spirit

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[0 : 0 0] Morning, Church. Our reading this morning comes from 1 Kings, chapter 19, and that's page 360 of the Church Bibles.

Page 360 of the Church Bibles. Elijah flees to Horeb.

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness.

He came to a broom bush, sat down under it, and prayed that he might die. I have had enough, Lord, he said. Take my life.

[1 : 1 2] I am no better than my ancestors. Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once, an angel touched him and said, Get up and eat.

He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you. So he got up and ate and drank.

Strengthened by that food, he traveled for 40 days and 40 nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night.

The Lord appears to Elijah. And the word of the Lord came to him. What are you doing here, Elijah? He replied, I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty.

[2 : 1 1] The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too. The Lord said, Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, What are you doing here, Elijah? He replied, I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword.

I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too. The Lord said to him, Go back the way you came and go to the desert of Damascus.

[3 : 29] When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat from Abel-Meholah, to succeed you as prophet.

Jehu will put to death any who escaped the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escaped the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal, and whose mouths have not kissed him.

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha, son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. Let me kiss my mother and father goodbye, he said, and then I will come with you.

Go back, Elijah replied. What have I done to you? So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate.

[4 : 48] Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks. Great.

Thanks very much, Alan, for reading. My name is Martin Ayres. I'm the senior minister here, and it's great to have you with us, whether you've been coming many decades or this is your first time here at St. Silas.

And we are going to be looking at that chapter together, so it would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at 1 Kings chapter 19. It's on page 360 there if you're using a church Bible.

And if you find it helpful, there's an outline inside the notice sheet just to see what we're doing as we follow that event through. But let's ask for God's help. Let's pray as we turn to God's word.

Lord, I'll just lead us in a prayer using some words from Psalm 119. So, gracious and loving Heavenly Father, bring us to understand the way of your precepts that we may meditate on your wonderful deeds.

[5 : 52] Open our eyes that we may see wonderful things in your law. And as we turn to your word together, broaden our understanding that we might run in the path of your commands.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, we're in this series at St. Silas looking at Elijah and Elisha. They were two prophets or messengers of God.

And the event that we're looking at here took place about 870 B.C. And in Elijah this morning, as we look at him, we're seeing a man saying to God, what is plan B?

What's plan B? I don't know if you remember the classic movie, The Italian Job. It's 50 years old now. And Charlie Croker is this guy, played by Michael Caine, and he plans a massive heist.

And he has to head to Turin. It's like, it's the great British heist, okay, if you're not British. And basically, he comes out of prison and he finds out that this big shipment of gold bullion is going to be delivered to Fiat in Turin.

[6 : 57] Because the Chinese are going to pay to have Fiat build a factory in China. And he thinks, we're going to have that. So he trains up a team and they set off in these minis, in these getaway cars, and they steal the gold in Turin.

And they've got these minis driving the gold through Turin. And they get to this, the ultimate getaway vehicle is a coach. And they get the gold onto the coach while the coach is in motion, driving it up this ramp.

And they get on and the whole team are on this coach and it's setting off through the Alps being driven. And they're all celebrating and the beers are flowing. And then the coach suddenly skids on a hairpin bend.

And it's left with half still on the road and half hanging over the cliff edge. It's literally a cliffhanger. The film ends with the crew, the team inside. Michael Caine, Charlie Crocker, is trying to reach the gold.

And as he goes, the gold slips down and the coach is teetering on the brink of the cliff edge. And he says, hang on a minute, lads. I've got a great idea. And it's one of these great lines in movie history.

[7 : 58] Hang on a minute, lads. I've got a great idea. And then the credits roll. You've got no idea what the idea was. And scientists have spent years trying to work out how they could have got the gold off the coach. But the team are looking at Crocker and they're thinking, okay, we did all the work.

Plan A has failed. What's plan B? What's the plan now, boss? And today, as we look at Elijah, we see a man in a similar kind of feeling towards God. God, we're in a series looking at Elijah's life and he's saying to God, your plan seems to have failed, God.

What is plan B? And as he asks the question, he's crashing. His spirit is crushed. So I don't know how you feel this morning, but for any of us who have been a Christian any significant length of time, if you throw yourself in wholeheartedly to being a Christian, there might well come moments in your life when you will feel totally perplexed by what God is doing in your life.

And you find yourself asking God, okay God, what's the plan here? It doesn't seem to be working out. What is plan B for my life? And when we look at how the Lord deals with Elijah here, he teaches us one extremely valuable lesson.

And if you've never seen it before, it is a wonderful thing to take on board. So our first point this morning is the man of God is in meltdown. The man of God is in meltdown. Last week, if you were here, we had one of the most dramatic moments in Bible history.

[9 : 28] In chapter 18, God's people are living in the promised land, but their leader, King Ahab, is systematically leading the people to worship a different God instead of the God of the Bible, Yahweh.

He's leading them to worship Baal. And his wife, Jezebel, is a complete villain. She's finding the prophets of Yahweh in the land and she's killing them. She's having them slaughtered.

And Elijah summons King Ahab and he summons the people of Israel and he gathers them at Mount Carmel and he says to the 850 prophets, build an altar for Baal and pray however you can.

So they, he builds an altar for Yahweh. He's there on his own and the prophets of Baal, they scream and they dance for hours on end asking Baal to send fire on the altar and it doesn't work so they start cutting themselves in case that would make Baal send fire and nothing happens because Baal isn't real.

And then Elijah, he doesn't cut himself, he doesn't dance, he doesn't scream, he just prays one simple prayer and Yahweh sends fire on the altar. It's a magnificent moment and you can see Elijah's heart in what he does and in the prayer he prays.

[10 : 44] that what he does is he has to rebuild the altar to Yahweh because it's been knocked down because what he longs for is for the people to worship God again and he prays to God and he says, answer me Lord so these people will know that you Lord are God and that you are turning their hearts back again.

In other words, Elijah's great passion is for revival. He wants the people of God's hearts to turn back to God again for God's glory that they would worship God for God's glory and God showed up that day in magnificent power and the fire came down and they put the prophets of Baal to death and Ahab goes home to his wife Jezebel.

The king returns to the palace and you can imagine the conversation between Ahab and Jezebel. Jezebel darling, it's been a terrible day. Baal didn't show up for our prophets.

Yahweh showed up for Elijah. It's a disaster. What do we do now? And what would we expect Jezebel to say then? Jezebel and Ahab, what are they going to say in the bedroom confronted with unequivocal proof that the God of the Bible is the only true God?

I guess Elijah expects them to repent and that the king will lead the nation back to God. But look at verse 2 of chapter 19.

[12 : 05] We've just heard about the prophets of Baal have been killed and verse 2. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, may the gods deal with me be it ever so severely if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. And it's a lesson for us for the times when our friends might say to us, if only I had more evidence then I would be a Christian.

When the truth is it's not ultimately evidence evidence that makes or breaks whether someone's a Christian. It's the attitude of our hearts towards God. Evidence is really important.

We're not a cult. We're not asking people to believe the incredible, the unreasonable. It's important that what we believe as Christians is credible. And Jesus Christ is credible. For my money his word is the only thing that makes sense of the world.

God has given us all the evidence that we need. He raised Jesus from the dead. He appeared again to hundreds of witnesses so that we can have their testimony and put our confidence in him.

[13 : 13] So we can talk about evidence but the key issue is how is your heart as you look into the Christian faith? Are you humble or are you hostile? Are your questions about the faith, are they because you can't believe it?

We can help you if you can't believe it. But are they that you can't believe it or are they that you won't believe it? Evidence doesn't help you if you're fundamentally not receptive towards God in your heart.

So Jezebel here, look at her, she hears the news of the miracle of Mount Carmel from her husband and she still fights for her ridiculous gods. It's ridiculous. And I think it's that reaction from Jezebel that crushes Elijah.

In verse 4 you head south right out of the promised land and Elijah is on a very foolish journey. Why has he gone from the promised land into the wilderness? In verse 8 he stays there 40 days and 40 nights.

Just as Israel was in the wilderness 40 years before they went into the promised land. They waited 40 days and 40 nights at Sinai for Moses to come down. And in verse 8 Elijah reaches Horeb the mountain of God.

[14 : 26] That's Mount Sinai, Horeb. He's gone back. And in verse 9 he goes into a cave. It's literally the cave. We don't know for certain but it seems pretty likely he's gone to the cleft in the rock that Moses went to when the Lord passed by and revealed his glory.

So do you see what's going on? Elijah is turning back the clock of Israel's history. He's rewinding back to when God gave the covenant to Israel on Mount Sinai because he's asking God what's plan B?

What's plan B, God? And all the while he is suicidal. By the end of verse 4 he's praying that he might die. In verse 4 he says take my life.

There's that famous Christian hymn isn't there? Take my life. Elijah has his own version and it goes take my life and let me be. There's no one else left. It's only me. He's gone from the heights of Mount Carmel to the depths of the desert.

And Simon Manchester who came and preached here earlier in the summer he told me the story of a man who went skydiving and I don't know if you've heard this story but the man jumps out of the plane skydiving and he pulls the cord and his parachute doesn't open and he's frantically trying everything to get his parachute to open and as he's plummeting towards the ground he sees a man hurtling up towards him.

[15 : 47] So as they pass in the air he says to the man excuse me do you know anything about how to open these new parachutes? And the man says to him I'm having enough trouble myself trying to operate my new gas barbecue.

Well last week we were with Elijah and he was soaring upwards and this week he's crashing back down again. Why? Because in chapter 17 two weeks ago chapter 17 the voice that controlled Elijah's state of mind and his emotions was the voice of the Lord.

And in chapter 18 at Mount Carmel the voice that's controlling Elijah's emotions is the voice of the Lord. and here in chapter 19 the voice that governs Elijah's emotions is the voice of Jezebel.

What she says in verse 2 it crushes him her hard-hearted determination that she will beat God and she will kill the people of God. And we need to see that today because we are in a similar position where we have voices all around us that we could listen to that could govern our emotions and our state of mind.

But God has clearly given us truth in his word that should govern our emotions. He assures us of wonderful things in his word. That God the Father loves us that God the Son loved us enough to die for us that God the Spirit lives in us to transform us that God is kind that he is faithful and he keeps his promises that we're on our way to glory if we trust Jesus.

[17 : 24] But all around us we hear voices every day every hour of every day that deny those realities and we spend too much of our time listening to those voices and not enough time listening to God's voice in his word.

So when I'm feeling like I'm in meltdown and I'm feeling very low or very stressed what's the one thing I really must do? I must listen to God's word. I must speak it to myself.

Instead of listening to my emotions and asking why they are low I need to speak to my emotions speak God's truth to them so that my spirits are governed again by God's unchanging realities that he is good trust him he's got a plan trust him he loves you trust him.

So that's our first point the man of God is in meltdown. How does the Lord deal with him? Our second point the man of God is restored. You just Yahweh it's extraordinary how just think about how Yahweh helps Elijah on his journey.

Elijah is on a foolish journey but we see the immense kindness of God because he shepherds Elijah he nourishes him he keeps him going even though he's going in the wrong direction.

[18 : 40] In verse 5 he falls asleep and the Lord sends an angel to tell Elijah to get up and eat. He provides freshly baked bread and water and then again the angel wakes Elijah and feeds him the Lord is sustaining him until he can arrive at the cleft at Mount Sinai the place where God appeared to Moses in glorious power and great mercy and founded his relationship with Israel so that when God asks him in verse 9 what are you doing here Elijah the emphasis is on here what are you doing here why have you come here Elijah why have you come back and Elijah says in verse 10 I'm here because everything is hopeless and your plan has failed verse 10 I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty the Israelites have rejected your covenant torn down your altars and put your prophets to death with the sword I'm the only one left and now they are trying to kill me too he wants plan B

Mount Sinai was the place where God acted with such great and glorious power that the people all pledged their allegiance to God in Exodus 19 they gathered at Mount Sinai and there was thunder and there was lightning and there was a thick cloud and there was terrifying noise and there was great fire and a great earthquake and the covenant was made but now Elijah sees the people of God have broken the covenant and he wants the fireworks again he wants the power to turn the people back so the Lord says go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord for the Lord is about to pass by and this is where this passage is so famous and it's so misunderstood Elijah gets given the fireworks that he came for there's the great and powerful wind it tears the mountains apart it shatters the rocks imagine that wind but we're told the Lord wasn't in the wind and then there's an earthquake but we're told the Lord wasn't in the earthquake and then there's the fire and the Lord isn't in the fire either and then the end of verse 12 we get the famous still small voice and after the fire came a gentle whisper and many people have taken this on board as the way

God spoke to Elijah that day and so the way that he would speak to us today there's even an old hymn about it about God speaking through the still small voice of calm and just before I was ordained to be a minister I went on a three day silent retreat you have to go and the guy who led the retreat I mean it's good to be silent but I did have to be there and the guy who ran the retreat the bishop talked about how it was so good to be there because we're listening out for God's gentle whisper the still small voice but that cannot be what's going on here that cannot be right because the gentle whisper does nothing for Elijah if you look at the end of verse 13 the Lord after the gentle whisper asks him exactly the same question again what are you doing here Elijah and he gets exactly the same answer in verse 14 Elijah has learned nothing from the gentle whisper so what's really going on

Elijah wanted fireworks at Sinai because he wants a powerful fresh start from God a new deal for God's people and he gets the fireworks but the Lord is not in them because there's no new deal and what he gets is the gentle whisper and what is it it's literally a thinness a silent sound a perceptible silence the sound of a barely audible gap why because Elijah needs to hear that there's nothing new to say the writer Bill Dumbrell says this the message at Mount Horeb for Elijah is no new message God's plan is firmly intact Jezebel hasn't taken God by surprise nothing takes God by surprise and nothing will ever thwart his plan and if we're willing to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to God's plans for the world today we're just as vulnerable to Elijah meltdown as Elijah was

God has made known to us his plan we live in the last days between Jesus resurrection and his return and his plan is to save people from every tribe and tongue and nation and he executes that plan by his spirit empowered people taking his gospel message about Jesus to the world so in Luke 24 Jesus tells us that the risen Jesus he says this is what is written the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem that's the plan we take the gospel message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus name to the world that's the plan but if we spend ourselves on that plan and we pin our hopes on it then we look around Scotland today and it's tempting to think the plan doesn't work anymore it's not working I mean even if you look at the church look at the churches around us in Glasgow many of them have given up on that plan they are not preaching the gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus name for people to be saved they've given up on that plan and one of the reasons neglected in some churches is because it's a message rejected by the nation people all over

[24 : 35] Scotland our friends our families they show no interest in Jesus or they get very angry about Jesus and so we share our faith with friends and we find that evangelism is often a very slow game with rejection and even humiliation at every turn and it's disheartening so we turn to God and we say God I can see your plan here in the word I see what Jesus wants us to do but just so we're clear when that plan isn't working what's the other plan what do we do instead what's the new plan for 2018 for Glasgow show us the power God show us the power again and God says well he doesn't say anything because there's no new message no new message despite appearances God's power is in his gospel about Jesus and nothing can stop his gospel plan that's our second point we've had the man of God in meltdown secondly the man of God is restored and thirdly the man of God is recommissioned if you look with me at verse 15 the Lord said to him go back the way you came and go to the desert of Damascus when you get there he's then given three people to anoint two of them to be kings and the third is to anoint Elisha who will become his successor so then in verses 19 to 21

Elijah anoints the first of those he anoints Elisha he doesn't anoint the other two yet and I think that's because God's revealing to him things that are still a long way off to demonstrate that God's wisdom and God's plan it looks ahead for generations it looks ahead for years we see short term problems and difficulties God looks down at Elijah and he looks down on us at St Silas through the telescope of eternity with a plan that spans nations and generations so Elijah was sent back the Lord sustained him on his foolish journey he restored him by telling him there's nothing new to here he's not starting again and he recommissions him to go back and get on with the Lord's work reassured that God is wise even though it's hidden God is powerfully at work so what does it mean for us today?

well let me just give three implications first Elijah was in meltdown because he listened to Jezebel let's be people who listen to the word of God and not to the words of the world I don't know who you've been listening to this week the political party conferences telling us who to put our trust in to put the country right the newspaper columnists the presenters of Channel 4 News the documentary writers maybe you've got a particular lecturer if you're a student you've got a lecturer who's becoming your guru you're really longing to hear what they think about things maybe there's a parent or your spouse or a friend who you always want to know what they think about things about the state of the world well Elijah's mistake was to listen too well to other people what steps could you take this week so that more than last week if you think about last week how could you be better this week at listening to God?

God's word needs to be a pair of glasses through which we view everything else God is kind trust him God is wise he's got a plan God is faithful he will build his church nothing will stop him so listen to God's word secondly we look for God in the word and not in the silence if we think that the perceptible silence for Elijah was a new word it leads us to a kind of Christian mysticism where we think it's when things go quiet that you can hear fresh things from God but the silence was because Elijah needed to hear that there wasn't a new message and that's a wonderful encouragement to us today it means that as long as you're in a country where you can freely access the Bible you have all of God's word that you will ever need God has spoken to us through Jesus Christ and we see him when the spirit of God takes the word of God and he speaks through it to us about Jesus we can know God there

I'm not saying that silence isn't useful I think some of us could do with a bit more silence to think about God and his glory and his wonder but you don't get it from here we look for God in the word not the silence and the third and final implication for us is let's be confident in God's wise plan his gospel plan so that we confidently spend ourselves and everything God's given us for the spreading of God's gospel word Elijah had to be reassured that God doesn't need a plan B and there are times when we feel the same but there is great encouragement in being reminded that God is incredibly wise and incredibly powerful we would love Mount Carmel to happen today wouldn't we wouldn't we love that if we could you know the roads are closed today for the big races wouldn't you love it if one day we closed the roads in Glasgow and we said we're going to have a big event in George Square and we invited the mosque leaders and the Sikh temple leaders and we said we're going to build some altars here and you pray to your gods and we'll pray to Yahweh and we'll see who's the real God and we'll wait for the fire we want Mount Carmel we want that kind of display of God's power today but we need to remember that Mount Carmel did nothing for Jezebel she was still a God-hater after Mount Carmel because in God's wisdom about the world

[30 : 25] Mount Carmel doesn't change people's hearts and Calvary does so he doesn't give us Carmel he gives us Calvary and we proclaim the cross of Jesus and it looks weak but it's powerful to change people's hearts forever and in verse 18 he reassures Elijah that he's not alone if you have a look verse 18 he says the Lord says to him I reserve 7,000 in Israel all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him Elijah thought it was all over that he's the last faithful prophet in the whole nation that's why he's giving up and God assures him he's got faithful people there's a remnant in Israel who are trusting Yahweh and we might feel the same today but the Apostle Paul uses that he quotes that passage in Romans 11 as people are concerned because of the rejection of Jesus and he uses that to reassure us God has his people he is saving people through Jesus he has a faithful remnant and he will go on like that and all he needs from us is that we are faithful that we keep trusting him we keep putting one obedient foot in front of the other we prayerfully share God's word with a lost world we don't lose our nerve we keep gospel proclamation at the very heart of what we're doing and we trust that on the last day when we're gathered with the multitude before the throne we'll be praising and rejoicing in God's unimaginable wisdom the way his saving plan took effect for Scotland and all the nations this year and through all the ages and we're going to go on praising him for that forever let's pray together we just have a moment of quiet to do business with God to reflect on his word and then I'll lead us in a prayer we just have to feel very carefully and we hope that you have lost and then we're going to Albanian to do business with God and then close back and then close back and then close back and then close back just and close toikte and there and then close back and then close back and close back and then close back and next to him

If you release on the Wenier you need a Wol Tool and let all the nations plan is the first part from me to book on canal we praise you and thank you heavenly father for revealing your character to us for your shepherding care of elijah and of us for your wisdom that nothing takes you by surprise for your kindness for your faithfulness help us to meet with you day by day in your word help us to let your word shape our lives our emotions our hearts listening to you instead of the world and we praise you for your gospel plan that your gospel is powerful to save everyone who believes and so we pray father god that you would help us not to be looking for a new message but to have our confidence restored in your same message of christ crucified and risen again that we would be effective in your great commission for your purposes and your glory amen we're going to respond to god's word by singing together if you'd like to stand so you you you you