

# 1 Kings 19 // The God Who Restores

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you open your pew Bibles at page 360, you'll be able to follow 1 Kings chapter 19.

! 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 and 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've had enough Lord, he said. Take my life. I'm no better than my ancestors.

[ 1 : 16 ] And 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. So he got up and ate and drank. But 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.

There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him. What are you doing here, Elijah? He replied, I've been very zealous but still having a moment. The moment is still having a moment.

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[ 2 : 24 ] came to him. What are you doing here, Elijah? He replied, I've 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're trying to kill me too.

The Lord said, go out, 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, 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've been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they're trying to kill me too. The Lord said to him, go back the way you came. Go to the desert of Damascus.

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-Maloa, to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape 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, found Elisha, son of Shaphat.

[ 4 : 31 ] 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 father and mother goodbye, he said, and then I'll 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. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Thank you, Lament, for reading that. If we've not met, I'm Martin Ayers, the lead pastor here. You can find an outline on the back of the notice sheet you'd find helpful. Please do keep 1 Kings chapter 19 open as we look at that together, and let's ask for God's help. Let's pray with some words from Psalm 119.

Mighty God and loving Heavenly Father, cause us to understand the way of your precepts, that we may meditate on your wonderful deeds. Open our eyes, that we may see wonderful things in your law, and broaden our understanding, that we might run in the path of your commands. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, it's hard when you've put your trust in someone, and then you start to doubt if they've really got a good plan after all. Some of you are getting on flights this week to the US to follow Scotland there in the World Cup, and maybe you're starting to believe after last night's big win.

[6:19] Now, in 1978, Scotland went to the World Cup in Argentina with a great groundswell of hope, and charismatic manager Ali McLeod had the nation thinking, we could actually win this. They were seen off from Hampden Park with an open-top bus, and then a helicopter, to go and bring the World Cup back to Scotland. Well, the first match was against Peru, and Ali McLeod was interviewed before the game, and asked why he hadn't bothered to go and watch Peru play any matches. And was he not worried about Peru? And Ali McLeod said, I don't really worry about other teams. I'm preparing my own team to perfection. Maybe the other team should be worried about us. Well, if Ali McLeod had done his homework, he would have given more attention to Teofilo Kubelas, who scored two stunning goals for Peru against Scotland. One of them with the outside of his boot from outside the box that left the Scotland players looking as though they'd never seen anyone shoot with the outside of their boot before. It was a crushing blow to realize that Ali McLeod's plan had failed. They couldn't recover to beat Iran in the next game, and they came home with crushing disappointment.

People laughed at that at the half nine, but I can see it's touched some raw nerves here at the half eleven service. The pain of it. But finding that someone doesn't have a plan, who you've put your trust in. Well, we find Elijah this morning, and he seems to have those kinds of questions about the living God. God's plan for his people.

Elijah has faithfully served it, and evidently, it's not working. And he's wondering, is God really trustworthy here after all? What is plan B from God?

So let's get into it. Our first point, Elijah is crushed by Jezebel's fury. Now, last week, lots of you were on the church weekend away. I was there too. So if you haven't yet caught up on YouTube, in here, in Main Church, last Sunday, they recreated one of the great moments of Bible history from 1 Kings 18.

It was on Mount Carmel, where, remember what's going on in Israel in this series winning 1 Kings. These are dark times. They're under King Ahab, who him and his wife Jezebel have led the people of God away from worshiping the God of the Bible.

[8:45] Yahweh, to worship false gods instead. And Elijah confronts the king in 1 Kings 18, and he says, let's have a God war, a God contest.

We'll go up the top of Mount Carmel, and I'll build an altar to the God of the Bible, Yahweh, and your prophets can build an altar to the God Baal, who you're all worshipping.

And then we'll call out for fire from heaven. Let's let the real God show up and show us who we should be following. So there are 850 prophets against Elijah, and they cry out to Baal, and they dance for Baal, and they cut themselves for Baal, and there's no fire.

Obviously, because Baal isn't real. And Elijah just prays a simple prayer, and there's fire from heaven. And it's a momentous moment.

Elijah thinks, this is it. You can tell what his heart is. It's that the people will turn back to God. And so what he prays to God is, answer me, Lord, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.

[10:01] That's what he wants. And then King Ahab heads home, and Elijah is empowered to go on ahead of him. And so I picture Elijah looking on at the palace as Ahab goes in to speak to his wife, Jezebel, and tell her what happened at the summit of Mount Carmel.

And you can imagine the conversation as Elijah's waiting for news. Jezebel, darling, it's been a terrible day. Baal didn't show up for our prophets. Yahweh showed up for Elijah.

What are we going to do now? And what might you expect Jezebel and Ahab to do after that? I guess Elijah's expecting they'll repent.

They'll turn back to God. But look at verse 2 of chapter 19. 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.

That is one of the prophets of Baal that have been put to death. And we hear what Elijah's response is in verse 3. Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. It's striking, isn't it?

[11:13] We sometimes think if only there was more evidence about the Christian faith, everyone would become a Christian. Why doesn't God make it more obvious that he's really there?

And it's good to talk about evidence because Jesus is the truth and we stake our lives on claims that are historically credible that there was an empty tomb, that Jesus is alive to prove that he's going to judge the world and save his people from sin and death.

But we're not to think if only we could create, recreate, 1 Kings chapter 18 today. You know, if we could build some altars one day in Kelvin Grove Park and gather the Muslims from the city central mosque and the Hindus and the Sikhs and the Mormons and the atheists from our city and all gather together and say some prayers to these different gods and then God sent, the God of the Bible, send fire to his altar and show everyone that he's real, then everyone would become a Christian.

It's striking. The miracle of Mount Carmel does not turn Ahab and Jezebel back to God. Isn't that extraordinary?

Sometimes people's objections are not because there's not enough evidence. It's not that they can't believe. It's that they won't believe because the bottom line is if the God of the Bible is there, it will mean change and people don't want to change.

[12:37] Jezebel doesn't want to change. So she hears the news of the miracle on Mount Carmel and she resolves to fight on for her ridiculous false gods. That's her heart.

And I think it's that reaction that crushes Elijah. So in verse 4, he heads south, right out of the promised land, perplexed, broken. By the end of verse 4, he's even praying he might die.

In verse 4 he says, take my life. And it's not the famous Christian hymn. If some of you know, take my life and let it be consecrated to thee. Now this is his own version of that hymn.

It goes, take my life and let me be. There's no one else left. It's now only me. He's saying, I've had enough, Lord. I've had enough. It's not worked. He's gone from the heights of Mount Carmel to despair in the desert.

Why? It's because in chapter 17, two weeks ago, the voice that governed Elijah's emotions was the word of God. And in chapter 18, the voice that governed Elijah's emotions was the word of God.

[13:45] And here in chapter 19, the voice that governs Elijah's emotions is the word of Jezebel. Her hard-heartedness, her threat that she will beat God and she will kill Elijah and she will put to death God's people.

It's crushing for him. And we can ask, when we feel in despair, when we feel like we can't go on, whose voice am I allowing to control my emotions and my heart?

Sometimes it's our own voice we're listening to too much. You know, the great preacher and writer, Martin Lloyd-Jones, in his great book, *Spiritual Depression*, talks about how we spend too much of our time listening to ourselves instead of talking to ourselves.

And so we wake up in the morning functionally believing things that aren't true of us in Christ. That we have no future, that we're guilty, that we should be ashamed, that we have no purpose in life.

And we have to speak truth from God to ourselves. So we're listening to his voice say, God the Father loves me. God the Son died for me. God the Spirit is in me, changing me.

[14:58] God's working in all things today for my good. I'm on my way to glory. No mind has ever conceived of what my future is with God. But there are also plenty of voices out there that we can listen to that can leave us feeling despair like Elijah felt here.

Maybe it would be like the proud disdain of a non-Christian colleague about what we believe. Or the stories of Christians being killed in Nigeria. Or the boasting of people around us of how well life is working out for them without God in their lives.

Some in our church family experience the pain of a non-Christian husband or wife or brother or sister or parent saying to them, I honestly think you are wasting your life with this. I will never believe it what you believe about Jesus. Well Elijah is crushed by Jezebel's fury. That's our first point. But then we go with him on an extraordinary journey.

So our second point is Elijah is consoled by the gentle whisper. We see the great kindness of God here, don't we, in his ministry to Elijah.

[16:08] In verse 5, an angel wakes him up in his despair and says, get up and eat. And he looks and by his head is some bread baked over hot coals.

Sounds like the sort of thing you'd get on a special day at Waitrose, doesn't it? Bread baked over hot coals. So God is keeping Elijah alive. But more than that is going on because the angel then comes again and wakes him up because the angel says, the journey is too much for you. He's on a journey. And something very specific is happening to Elijah here. He's in the wilderness. He's being given bread and water. And in verse 8, he's on a journey that takes 40 days and 40 nights.

So it's ringing bells to us of the Exodus where Moses spent that time at Mount Sinai when the Israelites started worshipping the golden calf.

They were in the wilderness. Moses was at the mountain 40 days and 40 nights. And sure enough, in verse 8, Elijah arrives at his destination and we're told it's Horeb, which is the other name for Mount Sinai, the mountain of God.

[17:18] He's gone back. So in verse 9, when it says he went to a cave, most likely it's the very cleft of the rock where Moses hid when the glorious presence of God passed by on the mountain.

It's as though Elijah, having seen Israel's reaction to God proving that he's there, his apostasy, wants to wind back the clock and go to the mountain again and say, we need a fresh start, God. We need a reboot. It's all gone wrong. And we see that as the Lord asks him in verse 9, what are you doing here, Elijah? And he comes out with it. He says, I'm here because everything is hopeless and your plan has failed.

Verse 10, have a look. 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. In other words, Sinai, the old covenant, it's dead in the water.

[18:23] What's the plan now, God? And the Lord says, go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord for the Lord is about to pass by.

Now, this is where the passage is very famous if you've been a Christian some years and you'll sometimes hear people talk about how God speaks to Elijah through a still, small voice and then the application to us becomes, are you needing to hear God's voice afresh today?

Well, get away from the bluster. Get away from the earthquakes in your life and listen out somewhere for the still, small voice of God. There's even a hymn about it.

Some of you will know it. Dear Lord and Father of Mankind, where we ask God in the hymn, we don't sing it here to be clear, but if you were to sing it, we ask God for the healing balm of his still, small voice of calm.

And then this becomes a theme for people's spiritual lives, listening out for the mystical still, small voice because that's where Elijah heard him. But I don't think that's what's going on here at all.

[19:32] When we think of Elijah's unique role for God with Israel, now he's back at Sinai where it all began. So something very different is going on. When Moses led the people to the foot of this very mountain, there was an earthquake and thunder and lightning and wind and fire and the people were terrified by the glory of God.

Why? Because God was doing something new, a new thing. He was inaugurating a new relationship with his people. The covenant, the promises God made that bound him to these people with blessings if they were faithful and judgment if they were unfaithful.

This time, Elijah's back at the mountain and he gets the Exodus-style fireworks again. A great and powerful wind first. Verse 11, extraordinary. It tears the mountains apart.

It shatters rocks, this wind. But then look in verse 11, the Lord was not in the wind. And then there's an earthquake but we're told the Lord isn't in the earthquake.

And then there's a fire but the Lord isn't there either. And then at the end of verse 12, after the fire came a gentle whisper.

[ 20 : 50 ] Now there's two key things to notice about the gentle whisper. The first is it does absolutely nothing for Elijah. If you look at the end of verse 13, the Lord asks him exactly the same question again.

What are you doing here, Elijah? And he gets exactly the same answer from Elijah. In verse 14, Elijah says the same thing as he said in verse 10.

It's all gone wrong, God. Elijah has learned nothing from the gentle whisper. The second thing is the gentle whisper is no noise at all.

It's literally the sound of silence, thinness, a perceptible quiet, the sound of a barely audible gap. Why? The message Elijah needs to hear on the mountain is there's nothing new. No new message. In other words, God's plan is right on track.

[ 22 : 02 ] And he simply asks Elijah again, what are you doing here, Elijah? Now he's going to send Elijah back to crack on. But let's just think to reflect here at this moment about where we might need to hear that today.

God has given us a plan and a mission. He's made known to us his plan. It's a plan that he promises in Revelation with the picture he gives John of our future, the Apostle John, that in the future there will be a great multitude of people saved from every nation.

A multitude no one can count, gathered around the throne to then live with God forever in the new creation. and it's a plan that Jesus is executing today as the good news about him is proclaimed. We've seen that in Luke's Gospel, we've seen it in 1 Timothy, we keep seeing it in the Bible as we look. Jesus has said that he will build his church as it advances, not even the gates of Hades will prevail against it and he grows his church through the simple, unimpressive, ordinary message of who Jesus is and why he came.

That he is God's forever king who's come and died for sins and risen to rule. As we pass on that message, we're assured by the Bible those words have God's power for everyone who believes to save.

[ 23 : 28 ] And if we line up our lives behind that mission in trust that God's plan works, that's costly for us with our relationships, our time, our talents, our financial giving, our efforts to be godly in the world rather than just retreating into a Christian bubble, trying to be distinctive in the world so that people will ask questions about the one we follow, giving our time to prepare to be involved in youth ministry here, children's ministry, leading small groups.

And often when we come on a Sunday we're reminded of that great plan through the songs we sing, through the words we hear from the Bible. how long does it take you typically to lose your confidence in that plan?

Some weeks for me it can be minutes. We look around and what do we see all around us in Glasgow? Does it really look as though God's plan to save a multitude from every nation is working here?

People around us seem so very far from the gospel, don't they? I was talking to someone in the break who was at the 9.30. She said, I go to my gym. She actually grew up in a country where people go to work singing gospel songs and other people will join in.

She said, I go to the gym, no one's a Christian, no one follows God. And then when anything goes wrong they blame God. I don't know what to do. How could this country ever come back to God?

[ 24 : 59 ] That's what she said she thinks, day by day. And maybe you and I think the same as we see thousands of people watching sport on a Sunday or just staying in bed on a Sunday or going to Tesco on a Sunday instead of thinking I'll go to church, I'll hear God speak.

Even when a great development in our times that lots of people are talking about in Scotland is that people are seeing that life without God is bankrupt. It doesn't keep its promises.

Lots of young adults are saying that, that atheism leaves you without morality, without hope, without meaning, without an identity. People are purposeless because of unemployment, they're pessimistic about the future, they're exhausted by social media.

Why isn't everyone asking questions about the God who is there? Why do they not find the gospel more compelling? people? We see it with children, don't we?

I've had conversations with parents who say, my kid is just so into TikTok, they're so into the distractions of the screen, how are they going to listen when I want to open the Bible with them and talk about Jesus?

[ 26 : 15 ] How is that message going to grip them with the awesomeness of God? So we turn to God and we ask him, God, if you love the people of Glasgow, what is plan B for our times?

Show us your power. Well, God says, no new message. Despite appearances, he knows exactly what he's doing. His plan is right on track and in his wisdom, despite how weak it looks, he saves people because his life-giving power is at work when we speak to others about Jesus.

So back to Elijah, we've seen that he was crushed by the fury of Jezebel. He's consoled by the silence on the mountain and thirdly, he's recommissioned by God.

So Elijah gets sent back in verse 15. The Lord says to him, go back the way you came. And first he's told, ominously, fetch the assassins.

Send for the assassins. In verse 15, he gets told to anoint two new kings. One of them isn't even for Israel. Israel. It's for an enemy of Israel. And to anoint as well, in verse 16, Elisha.

[ 27 : 29 ] In verse 17, we're told why, that they will bring the sword of judgment on these people who are unfaithful. And in the rest of kings, we'll see that judgment played out over these people who have turned from God.

And it is sobering for us to hear that God's mercy won't stand forever. God's mercy judges the people because it's exactly what he said he would do if they would be unfaithful.

And his word does not fail. And for us today, I think, I don't know about you, but I think one of the defeater beliefs that people hold against Christianity in our time in Scotland is people think, it can't be true because so many people around me don't believe it.

Come on. Is God really going to judge all these people, these droves of people because they don't follow Jesus? Are they really under the judgment of God? Surely, I know God says that in the Bible, but surely they'll have to be a different deal ultimately.

Well, Elijah hears, no, judgment is coming to Israel because God said it would come. And for us, no matter how much people think in Scotland, there's safety in numbers not to be interested in Jesus.

[ 28 : 42 ] when Jesus judges the world, it's going to be exactly as he said it will be, that it's those who have faith in him and them alone who will escape that judgment and be saved.

So God says, send for the assassins. But secondly, he says, know that there is a remnant. So look with me at verse 18. Yet I reserve 7,000 in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.

In other words, Elijah, don't be fooled into thinking that no one is being saved. There is a remnant. The 7,000 is a symbolic number.

There is a complete large number of people that I have kept for myself. God has a plan and it is a saving plan wherever people respond in humble trust to his promises.

And so today, it is easy, isn't it, to lose heart when we see people around us not interested in Jesus. It is easy to give up on being bold, on being mission minded, to think, oh, I just need to batten down the hatches and keep quiet.

[ 29 : 55 ] Well, let's be encouraged. We don't need a new message from the living God. Here and all over the world, he is showing mercy through Jesus.

Jesus. And his spirit is opening people's eyes, turning people back to God as they see his grace in Jesus. Last weekend, those of us who were on the weekend away heard Alistair Payne's story. He's the minister who came to speak to us. He said his parents are not believers in Jesus. He grew up, but when he was a teenager, he was a very confident atheist. And then he was doing a gap year as a mountain guide in the Highlands.

And a guy turned up one week in his crew to be guided by him with a Bible. And they got talking as they walked. And that was a key thing in him discovering who Jesus is and becoming a Christian.

And then I was thinking, think about the people we've baptized in recent months here at St. Silas. We've had a young engineer from Glasgow, Scotland born and bred, and three young women who, even each grew up in countries thousands of miles from each other, in families of completely different religious backgrounds to each other.

[ 31 : 14 ] And all have found confidence in Jesus' promises. They've been saved, they've got baptized here. God has a remnant.

People all over the world that he's saving. People in Scotland that he's saving. As we look around this room, here is evidence. He even saved you if you're trusting Jesus.

He is at work. And thirdly, God says to Elijah, appoint your successor. And in verse 19, Elijah goes to find Elisha, a prophet whose name means God saves.

And we're going to see in the chapters to come that Elisha will bring God's saving message out, not just to Israel, but to the nations around. And it reminds Elijah that God's timing is very different to ours.

Just as we could see looking forward from Elisha, that when Jesus comes, he, like Elijah, spends 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness.

[ 32 : 21 ] And then he's led up to a mountain. And the disciples with him see God's glory in Jesus as he's transfigured before them. And Moses and Elijah are there on that mountaintop.

And as Jesus comes down the mountain, he starts speaking to them of his death on a cross because he's come to die so that we who had turned from God and were lost can come back to him.

So folks, as we come into land, let's think about the implications of 1 Kings 19. Let me ask, whose voice are you letting control your emotions? Who are you listening to?

Is it a voice in the world or the word of God? And has the experience of people's lack of interest in Jesus left you feeling disheartened, unsure of the faithfulness of God, unsure of the effectiveness of God's work in the world today through his word?

Well, remember how God kindly restores Elijah. He raises him up again. How does he do it? He's gentle with him. He sustains him.

[ 33 : 30 ] He brings him back to God's word. How good it is in our lives to know God's got a plan. He knows exactly what he's doing.

His plan will stand. There's no new message because God's word is powerful to save and his plan is right on track. So let's be bold in sharing what we believe and as a church let's make sure that we stay with that same unchanging gospel message.

I've got a friend in ministry in Glasgow who because of this chapter whenever he sees me says, how are you doing Martin? I hope you haven't been getting any new messages Martin. Hope you've got no new message.

Hope St. Silas hasn't moved on to a new message. There's no new message. All God needs from us is that we're faithful in our lives, in our words, on mission. So let's pray together.

We praise you and thank you Heavenly Father for your kindness to us in the Lord Jesus. Thank you that you are saving us.

[ 34 : 44 ] And we pray that we will let your word govern our emotions instead of listening too much to other voices. Jesus. And may you grant us great confidence in the power of your gospel message.

That we would share the news about Jesus wherever you open the door of opportunity. And you would add to our number daily those being saved. For our good and that the people of Glasgow would stand together loving your grace and praising your name.

Amen.