

Let It Rain 1 Kings 18:41-46

In a time of great wickedness and evil, God has called a prophet – Elijah – to speak to His people. Israel had turned its back on God, worshipping idols. Three years of drought is drawing to an end, as God has promised rain (*see 1 Kings 18:1*). Israel has witnessed a contest between YHWH – the God of Elijah, and Baal and Asherah - the gods of Ahab and Jezebel. While the idols were silent, unable to bring an answer, God brought a powerful fire, showing His power to all Israel.

Sound of the Rushing Rain (verses 41)

We read that there is not even a cloud in the sky. This is blistering Mediterranean sun – yet Elijah hears rain. Elijah's response is as confusing as Noah's – prepared for what is to come, because he knows that God is utterly truthful, and faithful to His word. Elijah has heard God's promise - and despite there being no cloud in the sky, he was confident and excited about what was going to happen. Here we see a great example of faith – of believing in God's Word.

When all around you is parched land, are we like Elijah, hearing the sound of rushing rain? This faith, hearing the rushing rain, cannot be manufactured. We live in a world that is dark, surrounded by evil. The news is filled with stories of pain and suffering. God has made promise after promise to renew this world, to save. We are in a time of drought, but we have hope in the promises of God. If we have lost heart, despairing – what hope is there? If we are not calling upon one who is able to come in a moment, what is our purpose? We are called to bring hope to a world that is suffering from a great drought, and our hope comes from His promise and His word.

We can look at society and feel disheartened. There is no love of God here. Churches and Christians who love God are fast diminishing – so how can we have this hope? The redemption story does not start with us. It is not the love for Jesus that is the determining factor. Instead it is the love of Jesus for men and women. If this nation comes to love Jesus, it will be because Jesus has loved this nation first.

Q. How is our land suffering from 'drought'? What signs can we see of a nation that has lost hope in God?

Q. What promises from God do you hold onto? How can God's Word (*the Bible*) bring hope in times of darkness?

Elijah Bowed Himself Down (verse 42)

Elijah knows the rain is coming. He is certain the drought will end. His response is not to sit and wait – to put his feet up and expect God to move. Elijah has done his part – he has told the Israelites, but he doesn't stop there. Elijah has just been involved in a great sign of God's power, fire from Heaven showing God's might. This God is obviously able to make it rain and end the drought – but Elijah does not leave it there. Elijah's response is to pray.

Read James 5:16-18

God longs for us to come close to Him – to take time to be in His presence and call upon Him to do all He has said that He will do. Does he need us to do this? Of course not, but through prayer he is bidding us to come closer to Him – to know His heart and His will. Elijah has heard God's promise, and his response is to ask for it. Like a child holding onto a promise of a gift from their parent, Elijah is persistent in asking.

'Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God' (R. Kent Hughes – Disciplines of a Godly Man). We can get fed up with praying because we use it as a method to get God to do what we want. Jesus taught us to pray 'thy will be done', and His will is perfect. Each time we pray as Jesus prayed, our will is brought in line with His perfect will. Elijah knew God's promise, and so He prayed. He left the crowds, to be with His Heavenly Father. Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Our souls are restless until they find their rest in God. God wants to bless each of us. He wants us to know He is faithful.

Q. How important do we consider prayer to be? What challenges do we face in spending time in prayer?

Q. How do you 'withdraw to lonely places' to pray? What practical tips can we share to help each other make time and remove distractions from our time with God?

A Cloud on the Horizon (verse 43-44)

Elijah persevered in prayer, and he is eventually answered and vindicated. Seven times Elijah prayed. This is not a ten-second prayer, but a fervent prayer. God loves Elijah, and wants to know him. Our prayers can be set too low – asking God for things, but God wants us to know Him, and enjoy Him. Prayer brings us to God, and aligns us with Him. Elijah's perseverance is a reminder of the relationship God longs for us – to be with Him. God wants to bless us. God wants to give us good things, but much more He wants us to enjoy our maker.

This is a great moment of vindication for Elijah. There is a cloud, albeit a small cloud, and Elijah knows a deluge is coming. Elijah's faith has been in God, not in the physical signs, and he continues in faith, despite seeing only a cloud as small as a man's hand. Then, the sky grows black with rain clouds and a heavy rain pours on the nation of Israel. Elijah held onto the promise of God, and persisted with God.

Q. How can we be tempted to use prayer like a wish list rather than conversation and relationship with God?

Q. How can we be tempted to stop persevering for miraculous blessing at the sign of the 'small cloud'?

Q. What promises from God have you been tempted to give up on? How can you bring them back in prayer?

We are starting a weekly prayer meeting at the Acorn Bookshop – 7-8pm Sunday Evenings. We want to pray for God to bless this City, asking for the power of God to come. We have heard the promises from God for a downpour and we want to seek God, to claim these promises.