

Standing with The LORD 1 Kings 17: 1-6

This series looks at how God speaks to a nation – to a people – that has rejected God. Reading about Israel, from thousands of years ago, it is easy to separate ourselves from the story. However, for us in a nation that has turned away from God, this is just as applicable to us today.

Elijah is probably the most famous Old Testament prophet. The prophets were people who delivered God's message – normally for the people of Israel – direct from God. *God spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets (Hebrews 1:1)*. This isn't the 'prophecy in part' that we see today, but is His direct, authoritative word. Their message, and language used was often shocking and offensive, violent and explicit. The response was normally aggressive: Jeremiah thrown in a well; Daniel thrown to lions; Elijah was a marked man. It was not a fun job to be a prophet, and they would plead with God to give the task to someone else. Often, when we see people called to be God's prophet, there was a great reluctance. It was a tough job to have – yet it was important for the nation of Israel to hear.

Q. Why is fear of man such a challenge for us? How can we overcome this fear?

Hearts turned from God

Israel is God's treasured possession, chosen, called and loved. As we read about God's relationship with Israel there is great fondness and affection. As with every strong relationship, there is a need for reciprocal love. God asks of His people that they love Him. God asks the Israelites to join this relationship, to join this affection and fondness. He calls a people to worship Him and worship Him alone. If God had created all of creation, there is nothing else that deserves worship more than Him. To give worship to anything else, would be worshipping the creation, not the creator. If God exists, He is worthy of worship. Throughout the Old Testament, God has revealed Himself to the Israelites - and the response He deserves is their total worship.

As we read the history of the nation of Israel, we meet King David – the worshipping king. David – a man after God's own heart - knew God and loved Him. David was not perfect – an adulterous murderer – yet he knew how precious the word of God is – 'sweeter than honey' and 'more precious than gold'. David led the nation of Israel to love and praise their God. David is followed by his son, Solomon – a king who sought wisdom, and the understanding of God. Solomon was blessed by God, and even the Queen of Sheba sees the favour upon Israel, and glorifies God.

Q. The Queen of Sheba was amazed by the favour of God upon Israel - how can we as a church display the favour of God upon us to the surrounding world?

All is good until: *'Solomon took many wives, from many nations in defiance of God's word which said 'you shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their god.'* (1 Kings 11:2). The 'heart' of Solomon turned from God and consequently the heart of Israel too. Once Solomon rejected God's word and took many wives from many nations, there started a downward spiral. Solomon's son saw his father ignore scripture, and so gave it less authority. The next king: even less. Seven kings pass between Solomon and Ahab – in a period of 58 years - and the kings become more and more evil. By the time of Ahab, the God of Israel has been fully rejected, in favour of Baal – worshipped through temple prostitutes and child sacrifice.

Q. What does a life lived in obedience to God's Word look like? What ways can a person who finds reading very difficult still be shaped by the Word of God?

Q. What subtle changes has society made to God's commands, steering people away from His will?

Standing Before God or Against God?

Read 1 Kings 17:1

This is the first time we encounter Elijah. He just appears on the scene, confronting a king who is happy to execute anyone worshipping God rather than Baal – and he starts with the name of Yahweh – at odds with the status quo. Elijah is not pandering to the ego of the king, and is not on a popularity mission. This isn't about Elijah at all – it is about Yahweh, the God who lives – not a god made of wood or stone. The God who sees, hears, moves, feels – and speaks! Elijah knows God and stands with Him. He knows that in His presence there is fullness of joy – pleasures forever more. Elijah knew we stand before God as our judge and, if we stand with Him, we need not fear any man or king.

Q. What response do you receive when talking about God? What discourages you from talking about Jesus?

Q. How can we hold onto Yahweh – the God who lives - when confronted with objections and trials?

God is the source of both Saving Grace and Common Grace

Read James 5:17

This is devastating. No rain, means no food and no drink. Drought and famine does not sound compassionate and merciful. God is the source of common grace: food, water, breath - all the things we take for granted. If we reject His saving grace, worshipping the created things – the blessings of common grace – the kindest thing God can do is remove those idols. God will withdraw His common grace to bring you back to something infinitely better.

Elijah found himself in the time of drought, where common grace was being withdrawn – yet Elijah was obedient to the word of God and remains in the provision of God's common grace. God remains faithful to Elijah. Alone on a mountain God provides – even if it's the beaks of ravens.

Q. How can the comfort of 'common grace' become an idol? How is this seen in the lives around us?

Q. How can we express our gratitude and thanks for all the blessings God provides?