

Arise and Eat

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[0 : 00] But if we could, this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read. 1 Kings chapter 19.

1 Kings 19. And if we read again, if we read again at verse 5. 1 Kings 19 and verse 5.

But those wonderful words that the Lord said to Elijah, there in verse 7.

Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you. Arise and eat. You know, when we think of Elijah, we often think of him as this great and glorious servant of the Lord.

We think of Elijah as this wonderful prophet, this wonderful preacher of God's word. We think of Elijah as someone who was fearless and someone who was faithful to the Lord.

[1 : 47] We think of Elijah as someone who was strong in his convictions and stable in his character. When we think of Elijah, we think of someone who was determined to stand up and someone who dared to even stand alone.

When we think of Elijah, we think of him as this man of prayer, this man of passion, this man of purpose. We think of him as someone who was so unlike us.

So unlike us. And yet James tells us in his letter that Elijah was a man just like us. Elijah was a man just like us.

And of course, when we read that in James' letter, we think, well, that can't be true. That can't possibly be true. Because I look at myself and I look at Elijah on the pages of Scripture and I think, well, I'm nothing like Elijah.

Elijah was the Lord's prophet. Elijah was the Lord's preacher. Elijah was one who proclaimed God's truth. He heralded before God's people his covenant. He challenged any who worshipped false gods and bowed down to idols.

[2 : 54] Elijah was a man who was full of the Lord. Elijah was a man who was on fire for the Lord. He was a man who boldly confronted the government of his day. He addressed King Ahab again and again to his face.

He even told Queen Jezebel that she was this wicked woman. Even Elijah's prayers were powerful. You remember how he prayed and for three and a half years there was drought.

There was no rain. Then he prayed again and fire fell from heaven. Then he prayed again and then the rain fell from heaven. Elijah's prayers were powerful prayers.

You look at the life and legacy of the prophet Elijah and you then read in the Bible and you think, the Bible must have it wrong. The Bible must be completely wrong because Elijah is nothing like me.

He's nothing like us. And yet when we come to this chapter, one of my favourite chapters in the Bible, we're reminded and reassured that, as you'd expect, the Bible is right.

[3 : 57] And Elijah was a man just like us. Just like us. Because in this chapter, 1 Kings 19, we see that, as my good friend J.C. Ryle would often say, we see here that the best of men are only that.

They are men at best. They're just men. The best of men are only men at best. And in this chapter, 1 Kings 19, Elijah, we see he's in a spiritual slump and he needs a spiritual supper.

He's in a spiritual slump and he needs a spiritual supper. There are two headings this evening. A spiritual slump and a spiritual supper. So first of all, we see a spiritual slump.

We read there in verse 1. We're told that Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with a sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.

Then he was afraid and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came

and sat down under a juniper tree.

[5 : 19] And he asked that he might die, saying, It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my father.

You know, when Elijah hit a spiritual slump, the nation of Israel was in a spiritual state. The covenant king, who was Ahab, he had led the covenant people, who were Israel, he had led them into covenant unfaithfulness through idolatry.

And it had brought this drought upon the land. It had brought a covenant curse. The nation was in a spiritual state, which led to this spiritual showdown on the top of Mount Carmel.

You see that in the previous chapter, 1 Kings 18. Where Elijah, we're told there, that he confronted and he challenged the prophets and the people as to why they were still undecided.

Why they were still halting between two opinions. And Elijah gave them an ultimatum. He said, If the Lord is God, follow him. But if he is Baal, then follow him.

[6 : 27] But let's see who's through. The God who answers by fire, he says, let him be God. And you know the story. How Mount Carmel was this vision of victory for Elijah.

It was this time of triumph. It was a reason to rejoice. Because Elijah's powerful prayer was answered. And the Lord revealed himself as the living and true God.

He answered by fire. And the fire fell upon the altar. And all the people fell on their faces, crying to the Lord, saying, The Lord, he is God.

The Lord, he is God. And you know, if there was ever a mountaintop experience in the life of one of the Lord's people, that was it. You know, that was the first sermon I ever preached on, was 1 Kings 18.

Because I thought, well, what a mountaintop experience. What a thing to see. To see the fire of the Lord fall. And to see the Lord move in the most wonderful way in front of all his people.

[7 : 29] And yet you come to this chapter, chapter 19. And you see that the spiritual showdown that took place on the top of Mount Carmel, it now seems like a distant memory.

Because that mountaintop experience, it had very quickly been brought, crashing down into the valley of testing.

Where Elijah, he's no longer standing strong and full of faith on the top of Mount Carmel. No, his boldness, his boldness has been bashed. And his courage has completely collapsed.

And with a word just from Queen Jezebel, wicked Queen Jezebel, Elijah finds himself in the throes of defeat. And you know, you read through from one chapter to the next, and you see that in only a few verses, Elijah has gone from the mountaintop right down into the valley.

He's gone from the mountain to the valley, where we find Elijah asking, what's the point? Why am I here? I am of absolute no use to the Lord.

[8 : 38] He says, it is enough now, O Lord. Take away my life, for I am no better than my father. And you're my friend, you see that Elijah is so like us, isn't he?

He's so like us. Because is it not true that there are times in our Christian experience, when we're on the mountaintop, we feel that we're spiritually alive, we're spiritually alert, we're so close to the Lord.

We have all the promises of God's word, we have the presence of his spirit, we know his closeness. More than that, we could say that we have the power of God in our heart, because the joy of the Lord is our strength.

There are times in our Christian experience, where we feel that our cup is not just full, it's running over. And during those times, prayer seems easy.

Reading the Bible, it's engaging. Going to church is effortless. And even being in fellowship with other Christians, it's enjoyable. My friend, there are times in our Christian experience, when we're on the mountaintop, when we're seeing the glory of the Lord, when we see who the Lord is, that the Lord, he is God.

[9 : 51] But as you know, maybe only too well, there are other times, like chapter 19 here, when we find ourselves in the valley of testing. And with Elijah, who is just like us, we feel battered and bruised.

We feel downcast and depressed. We feel weak and weary and worn out. We feel sensitive in our faith. We feel isolated from the church.

We feel distant from the Lord. We feel lonely as a Christian. We feel attacked on every side by the devil. And we feel that we lack assurance or any strength and vitality that we once had.

And you look at Elijah and you think, he's just like us. He's just like us. Aren't you so thankful that Elijah is just like us?

And you know, there was actually an 18th century hymn writer who could relate to all of Elijah's emotions in chapter 19.

[10:52] Maybe not so much in chapter 18, but certainly chapter 19. He was a hymn writer who often went through a spiritual slump. He was the well-known hymn writer called William Cowper.

He was often found in the valley. He often found himself in the valley rather than on the mountaintop. William Cowper, he suffered many years.

As a Christian, he suffered many years in the dark valley of depression. And when you read his hymns and you understand his character, you see that his hymns often reflected how he felt.

Especially his hymn, Oh for a closer walk with God. And that's how Elijah was feeling at that moment. He's in the valley. He wants a closer walk with God.

And Cowper himself, he writes, Oh for a closer walk with God. A calm and heavenly frame. A light to shine upon the road that leads me to the Lamb.

[11:55] Where is the blessedness I knew when first I sought the Lord? Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and his word? What peaceful hours I then enjoyed.

How sweet their memories still. But they have left an aching void the world can never fill. And he goes through his hymn. And he concludes his hymn.

Cowper concludes his hymn. He says, So shall my walk be close with God. Calm and serene my frame. So pure our light shall mark the road that leads me to the Lamb.

You know like Cowper, Elijah was a man who struggled in his spiritual slump. And he needed to be encouraged. He needed to be equipped.

He needed to be enabled to keep and continue to serve the Lord. And so in his spiritual slump, we see that the Lord provides a spiritual supper.

[12:58] That's what we see secondly. The Lord provides a spiritual supper. So a spiritual slump and then a spiritual supper. We see that in verse 4. We read that Elijah himself went a day's journey into the wilderness.

And he came and sat down under a juniper tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, It is enough now, O Lord. Take away my life, for I am no better than my father's.

And he lay down and slept under the juniper tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water.

And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came a second time and touched him and said, Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.

You know, Elijah had thought that Mount Carmel was going to be this turning point for the nation of Israel. He thought that because the nation of Israel was in a spiritual state of rebellion against the Lord, he thought Carmel would change everything.

[14:10] That because the people, because the fire of the Lord fell and because the people fell onto their faces crying, The Lord, He is God. He thought that would change everything. He even thought that Mount Carmel would be a turning point for Jezebel.

He thought it would result in repentance, where she would turn to the Lord in repentance. But as we read in the opening verses, when Elijah heard that Jezebel's heart was even harder than it was before.

As a servant of the Lord, Elijah felt completely useless. He felt so unworthy to be called or even considered a prophet, he felt like an absolute failure.

Complete failure. And so what does Elijah do? He runs away. We're told that he runs from his problems, he runs from everything and every one and he comes and sits down under this juniper tree, this broom tree and he prays.

It's enough now. It is enough now, O Lord. Take away my life. I am no better than my father. And you know what's remarkable is that the answer which came from heaven was no.

[15:25] Every other time Elijah had prayed his powerful prayers for drought, for fire, for rain, the Lord said yes. But when Elijah prayed this prayer, instead of answering Elijah's powerful prayer, the Lord said no.

And the Lord drew near to Elijah. He drew near to his downcast and depressed prophet and he drew near to him to strengthen him and sustain him, to encourage him and equip him and enable

him to keep going.

And you know, this is one of my favourite verses in the Bible. I often come back to it because in that verse, in verse 7, we're reminded of how gracious the Lord is when we are in our spiritual slump.

That the Lord compassionately condescends to Elijah. He condescends to his prophet and he says to him, arise and eat because the journey is too great for you.

Arise and eat because the journey is too great for you. And you know, what better word of encouragement could the Lord give than to provide for his servant a table in the wilderness?

[16:46] To provide for one who was battered and broken and burdened, who was weary and worn and completely weak. What better thing could the Lord do than provide a table for him in the wilderness and then call him to come to that table?

Arise and eat because the journey is too great for you. You know, have you ever been there? Have you ever been there? Have you ever sat under the juniper tree thinking you are of no use to the Lord?

I have. That's why I'm preaching this tonight. Have you ever sat under the juniper tree feeling like a complete failure? I have.

Have you ever sat under the juniper tree feeling so useless, so unworthy as a Christian? Have you ever sat under the juniper tree wondering, where is the Lord in all this?

Where is the Lord in my times of doubt and my times of discouragement? Where is the Lord in my worries and my weaknesses? Where is the Lord in my trials and my tribulations? Where is the Lord in my pains and my problems and my sicknesses and my sorrows?

[18:01] Because blessing seems like yesterday's news. But today it's Psalm 42, O why art thou cast down my soul?

And yet you come to a chapter like this one and you see that the wonder of wonders is that when we're under the juniper tree the Lord comes to us and he comes alongside us in our fragile feelings of weakness and being worn out and battered and bruised and tired and temperamental and he speaks into our very situation under circumstances and he just says to us arise and eat because the journey is too great for you.

And you know let's be honest and I think we should always be honest with one another this journey is too great for us. That's why we need to be kept each and every day.

This journey this Christian journey this wilderness journey it's too great for us. It's a journey full of darkness full of dangers full of difficulties. It's a journey full of hardship and heartache and heartbreak.

It's full of sin and sickness and suffering and sorrow. But you come back to the Bible and we're reminded that in the glory of the gospel and in this wilderness journey the Lord calls us and even commands us to come to his table.

[19:30] And he says with his pastoral care, his pastoral concern, his pastoral compassion that only he as a good shepherd can say. And he says to us so simply, arise and eat because the journey is too great for you.

And this is what I want us to remember as we contemplate and even as we consider sitting at the Lord's table at this Lord's day. That when we're in a spiritual slump, the Lord provides for us a spiritual supper.

And he does so in order to strengthen us and sustain us in this wilderness journey. And you know this is what I love about this chapter. Because when Elijah sat down under the juniper tree, he had removal on his mind.

He was saying it's enough. I've had enough, Lord. Take away my life. He thought he was going to be removed from the service of the Lord. That's not what the Lord was thinking. The Lord didn't have removal on his mind.

The Lord had renewal on his mind. The Lord wanted to renew Elijah and refresh Elijah and restore Elijah for further works of service.

[20:41] In this spiritual slump, the Lord provided a spiritual supper to strengthen and sustain Elijah for the journey. Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.

And that's what we saw as we read on in the chapter. Elijah was brought, as we read, he was brought to Mount Horeb. But even when he was brought to Mount Horeb, Elijah didn't know why he was there.

The Lord even asks Elijah, what are you doing here, Elijah? Why have you come to Horeb, Elijah? And all Elijah does is complain. He complains.

He says everything is lost. There's nothing left. The cause is hopeless. I'm hopeless. I'm useless. Everything's a mess. The church is in ruins. There's nothing I can do. And what does the Lord say? What does the Lord say? Verse 11. Go out and stand on the mount. before the Lord. And behold, the Lord passed by. And a great and strong wind tore the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord.

[21 : 45] But the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.

And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. I prefer the authorised version. The sound of a still, small voice.

The glory of the Lord passed by. There was wind. There was an earthquake. There was fire. But the Lord didn't reveal himself to Elijah in the dramatic way he did, he had done at Mount Carmel.

No, the Lord spoke to Elijah so powerfully and so personally with a still small voice.

And that's how the Lord speaks to us, isn't it? He speaks to his people. He doesn't speak to us with the voice from heaven or the bright lights in the sky. There are so many people waiting for that. And yet the Lord speaks to us.

[22 : 49] He speaks to us directly. He speaks to us personally. He speaks to us powerfully, not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but with a still small voice.

And with his still small voice he calls us and he commands us. He says, come, arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.

And is that not our greatest encouragement tonight? That whatever painful providence we're facing or whatever circumstances or situation we're in, even if we feel like we're feeble and fragile as a believer or we feel like a failure as a Christian, the Lord condescends to us.

The Lord comes to us. And the Lord calls us, the Lord commands us to come into his presence and listen to his still small voice and feast at his table.

Because at his table, through those simple and yet solemn elements of bread and wine, he speaks to us even there with his still small voice and he says to us, this is my body.

[24 : 11] This is my body which is broken for you. Take, eat, do this in remembrance of me. Just like he said to Elijah, take, eat, do this in remembrance of me.

And this cup in the new covenant is the new covenant in my blood. Do this in remembrance of me. You know, the Lord calls us, commands us to come into his presence, to listen to his still small voice and to feast at his table.

He calls us and commands us to gather around his word so that we remember the simple truth that we cannot do it ourselves. But his grace is always sufficient.

It's sufficient to keep us going in this wilderness journey. And you know, the Lord knows. That's the great thing about this chapter. The Lord knows that the journey is too great for us.

He knows that we need to be strengthened and sustained. He knows that we need to be reminded and reassured again and again and again of his goodness and his grace and his glory. He knows that we need to be encouraged and equipped and enabled to keep going, to keep on keeping on in the pilgrim's progress.

[25 : 28] He knows all that because he knows us better than we know ourselves. Which is why he says to us so lovingly, so graciously, arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.

Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you. And you know, it was this call, this command, that's what kept William Cowper going in all that he was going through as a Christian.

Because despite his many spiritual slumps, it was this spiritual supper, the Lord's supper, that's what encouraged him, that's what equipped him, that's what enabled him to keep going, to keep on keeping on, because he kept looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

And you know, when you read William Cowper's hymns, one of his most famous hymns, is when he's looking to Jesus. And when you understand the man, you see what he's getting at.

You understand his struggle with this spiritual slump. He says, there is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners plunge beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.

[26 : 47] The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day, and there have I as vile as he, washed all my sins away.

Dear dying lamb, thy precious blood shall never lose its power, till all the ransomed church of God be saved to sin no more, ere since by faith I saw the stream, thy flowing wounds supply.
And this is how he finishes. Redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die. My friend, we have been reminded this evening that in our weakness, in our tiredness, in our absolute need of the Lord, the Lord says to us, arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.
Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.
Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we confess, O Lord, that we often find ourselves in that spiritual slump, and sometimes it's our own doing, where we have taken our eyes off thee, we have focused more upon the world around us, and the flesh, and the devil, and we have not set our affection on things above where Christ is.

But Lord, help us, we pray, even as we consider and contemplate coming to the Lord's table again, that we would see it as a means of grace, a means to strengthen us and sustain us, a means to remind us and reassure us that the Lord is for us, and that greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world.

[28 : 43] It is a wonder to us that Jesus is in us at all, it is a wonder to us that we know grace, that we have come to know the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and help us then, we pray, to keep confessing that he is Lord, to keep coming to him and keep claiming him as Saviour, a Lord that we might do as we have been commanded this evening, to arise and eat, knowing only too well that the journey is too great for us.

Bless us, Lord, we pray, strengthen us and sustain us, we ask, and go before us in everything, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

We're going to conclude our service this evening. We're going to sing in Psalm 43, Psalm 43, in the Scottish Psalter, page 264.

Psalm 43, Psalm 43, Psalm 43, Psalm 43, Psalm 43, we're singing from verse 3 down to the end of the psalm. As we mentioned, Psalm 42 and 43 are very closely connected by that one question. Verse 5 of Psalm 42, O why art thou cast down my soul? Why in me so dismayed? In verse 11, O why art thou cast down my soul? Why thus with grief oppressed?

[30 : 16] And then verse 5 of Psalm 43, Why art thou then cast down my soul? What should discourage thee? And why with vexing thoughts art thou disquieted in me?

And then comes the answer, Still trust in God for him to praise. Good cause I yet shall have. He of my countenance is the health, my God that doth me save.

So Psalm 43 from verse 3 down to the end of the psalm to God's praise. Amen. All stand on thy life, Lord, and thy truth.

Let them be nice to me, and bring me to thy holy hill, in where thy dwelling's fear.

And will I too cross all the gold, to all my cheapest choice.

[31 : 45] Yea, God, my God, thy name to praise, my heart my will employ.

Why art thou dead, cast down my soul?

What should discourage thee? And why with dancing thoughts art thou?

Tis quiet in me. Tell trust in God, for him to praise, good cause I yet shall have.

He, O my count, and tis the hell, my God, that thou art me still.

[33 : 21] Amen. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.