

Kings and Prophets 13-09-13a

This is Friday the 13th of September 2013 and we continue our study of Kings and Prophets. We're looking at the career of Elijah and this is the second of a two-part excursion into the New Testament to see some of the mentions of the prophet Elijah there. He is mentioned over a dozen times in the New Testament and those mentions help us understand the importance of what we are looking at in 1 Kings and in particular with regard to his prophetic ministry.

And we began last time looking at this very fascinating, I think one of the most, perhaps the most significant mention of Elijah outside of the transfiguration is in James chapter 5 and that's where we will pick up tonight. But let's take a moment at the outset to ask God's blessing on our study and ensure that we're susceptible to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit so that this will be time that is well spent, that will be meaningful and that will challenge each of us in the days that remain to us in this life. Shall we pray? Father, what a blessing it is each week to arrive at Friday night and look forward to fellowship and nourishment for our souls in your Word.

The encouragement and the enthusiasm that we share as we look together at the things that are contained in your Word. We thank you for this opportunity. We dedicate this time to you and to appreciating your grace and your love for us expressed through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that as we look at these things, not only can we gain a better understanding of the truth of your Word, but that it will contribute to our appreciation for Him and for you, that it will result in our increased dedication to walk the narrow road that leads through the straight gate to life, that as a result of that we will both reflect your glory now and in the ages to come and that we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

In James chapter 5, we began looking at this passage last time and it's a real revelation, I think. There's been a lot of struggling to understand this passage rightly, to apply it correctly, to see it contextually. For those of us that are not convinced that physical miracles of a spectacular nature are currently proliferating, I think they happen, but I don't think they happen often and I think they happen in places where God's purpose in all such miracles is accomplished.

They are a sign. They authenticate God's messengers. They indicate the authenticity of the message that is being delivered by God's messengers.

This has always been the case. Every miracle in the Bible has this as an identifying feature. And so my question is, in fact, I just had sort of a bizarre conversation with an acquaintance of mine this week who claimed that when he gets angry at people, God performs miraculous things.

Pictures fly off the wall and so on. And I thought, and I respect this guy. We have cordial relations.

But I was trying to find a tactful way to say, how do you view this phenomenon that all the miracles in the Bible are associated with your prophets, your apostles, messengers of God,

commissioned divinely ordained, marked out by God for the function of communicating to God's people, emphatically drawing attention to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but you got mad at somebody and you believe that God made pictures fly off the wall just so that they would know that you and God are tight? What was the purpose? In what way was the gospel advanced? Were the people of God blessed? The one common thread through the three, four, or five episodes that he related is that he was really angry each time. So are you a walking instrument of the wrath of God and your wrath is God's wrath? How do you view this? And he said, well, you know, this is all part of the Catholic thing. And I said, well, just as a side note, if you're really strongly convinced that the pope and each of the popes, going back in the unbroken line of popes to the apostle Peter, are in fact God's ordained commissioned messengers, and if God's commissioned and ordained messengers so often in biblical history have been marked out and authenticated as from God and for God and serving God by these miraculous interventions, I'm just curious, when is the last time a pope did one of these? Outright on TV, physical miracle, the blind see, the dead are raised, lightning takes the top off a mountain, fire from heaven type of thing.

If these guys, if we are supposed to take them as the vicar of Christ, one teensy demonstration would go far to convincing me that this is all on the up and up. Each new pope walks out and has a day of healing, all that come to him are healed, or some congenitally blind or lame. It just doesn't seem to happen.

So I'm curious how you work this in your mind. But this brings me back to our study of Elijah, and in particular this mention of Elijah by the Apostle James in chapter 5 of his letter. Beginning at verse 13, he is discussing conduct in the church and particularly behavior as a Christian.

This is your walk before God and your conduct toward one another. So he says in verse 9 for example of that chapter, chapter 5, Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Do not grumble against one another.

And the word here is perhaps helpful if you look at it in Greek, because it really means, this is *stenazo*, S-T-N-A-Z-O in Greek, which really means to groan, to sigh. So this doesn't even have to be a verbal expression of disgust or discouragement or whatever else. This can be just a look and a noise, which is a higher standard to meet.

You can probably avoid making a comment, but can you avoid the look and the noise? This is *stenazo*. *Stenazo* is our body language of a sort of supercilious denigration of someone else, a putting down. It can be anything from mocking to disappointment to disgust to distaste to oh really or are you kidding? That's *stenazo*.

Do not *stenazo* against one another. And this is an extremely difficult thing, especially for those of us that are afflicted with the shortcoming of impatience, which is closely related to arrogance unfortunately, but against one another, brethren. And what this is primarily a reminder of is we are on the same team and a better reaction, the godly reaction, the Christlike reaction, is not one of a critical negative expression, but of a positive helpful expression.

If you want the team to function, instead of wasting your time putting somebody down and making them feel bad over what they've done, the better thing is to be an encouragement. If you really do know how to do this thing better, if you really do have better judgment, if you've got more experience, if you've got a greater degree of comprehension and understanding in this area, to be a blessing to that person by imparting some of this or putting a shoulder under their load or helping them in some way is much more Christlike, it is much more putting the interests of others ahead of our own, it's easy to have sort of a false sense of superiority by doing this stenazo thing. The reason I point this out, this is not a part of our Elijah passage, except that it is.

We are going to see Elijah expressing great disappointment that he alone seems to be faithful to God. Everybody has dropped by the wayside. Elijah is a classic Old Testament example, as is Jonah and a few others, of this failing, this attitude.

And God is going to have to bring Elijah up short, and God is actually going to replace Elijah at the point that he expresses this attitude. Who is the other prophet that stood on the Mount of Transfiguration with the Lord Jesus? And what kept him from going into the land of promise? Stenazo. Must we bring forth water for you out of this rock, smack, when he was supposed to speak, instead of strike? Stenazo is a striking, instead of a speaking attitude.

So this really does pertain. And it's important to get this context when you get down to the section that we are looking at, beginning in verse 13. Do not have this superior, downgrading attitude, degrading attitude toward others.

You know, harumph. I can't believe I just saw you do what you have done, or I can't believe you just failed to do this thing. And, of course, context is everything.

Parents are supposed to discipline their children, employers and authorities are supposed to point out shortcomings. But you can do this in a constructive way. And there is a time to be abrupt.

Look at the Lord Jesus with the woes to the Pharisees. But was Jesus guilty of this Stenazo attitude? No. There is a time and there is a place for strong rebuke.

The Apostle Paul dishes out some strong rebukes in his letters. But we want to have thought ahead of time, when I give this rebuke in my function and position of authority or oversight or responsibility, am I guilty of this or am I using rebuke and correction in its proper way? So we need to give this some thought and be careful that if we do find that it is an occasion for strong rebuke, we do it in a Christ-like way and not in a sinful way, which is what this is talking about. Do not groan.

Do not roll your eyes at one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. And all you have to do is think about the Lord Jesus saying, Judge not, lest ye be judged. The judgment with which you judge others is the judgment with which you will be judged.

The measure with which you measure is the one used to measure out to you. You will be forgiven as you forgive others. This is in the Lord's prayer.

So do we really want to get to the judgment seat and have the Lord groan and roll his eyes when we get there? This is our objectivity. This is the strength of God, the truth of God's Word, having the power to change our attitude. If that thought doesn't change your mind about how to behave, you're not saved.

You don't love the Lord Jesus and you care nothing for His approval, His fellowship, to be with Him, to live in His presence, to be a part of His ongoing plan and purpose. You can't love the Lord Jesus and care about Him and His functions and His plans and purposes and maintain this kind of attitude because the parable of the unjust servant, anyone, it's the same thing. Lest you be condemned.

Behold is an old word that means look, look. And we don't say behold when we talk to each other anymore, do we? I don't walk in and find something undone and say behold. I say look.

And that's what James says. Look, the judge is standing at the door. Why, by the way, is the judge standing at the door? Why isn't he, the judge is sitting on the seat? The judge is wrapping his gavel.

The judge is assembling the jury. Why does it say the judge is standing at the door? What happens right after he stands at the door? He comes in. Behold I stand at the door and knock.

If any man opens the door, what do you want? Do you want the measure picked up that you've been measuring out to others and have it measured out to you? Do you want to be judged with the judgment with which you've been judging others? Or do you want to sit down and sup with him and he with me? The judge is standing at the door. What kind of visit do you want this to be? Do you want this to be a happy occasion of fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Or do you want it to be I'm, what is it you're always telling me? I'm the only one there without an ashtray or what? How does that work? Yeah. You walk in and everybody's got a chair but you.

Everybody's facing the other way but you. What kind of a visit do you want it to be? The judge is standing at the door. Is he here for a fellowship meal or is he here for judgment? We decide this.

So then he says, my brethren. And look at James himself not doing the stenazzo thing. He's had some sharp words in this epistle.

But he says, my brothers. It's pretty tough to come down with both feet on someone if you begin out by saying, you know, my son, my daughter, my brother, my brother. You know, this is an arm around the shoulder.

It's an encouragement. It is an exhortation, not a negative sort of rebuking tone. My brethren take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord as an example of what authority and

condemnation as an example of rebuke and correction.

Take them as an example of what? Suffering and patience. Don't take the prophets as an example of, well, when I get mad, pictures fly off the wall. When I get mad, stuff breaks.

I got in a conversation and some people were giving me a hard time and a year later they were both dead. People have told me this. Unless you can show me your prophet or apostle card, God is not bringing out the bears to tear the children up because they called you old baldy.

Be careful about this. We are not in a position for signed miracles to be attached to us. It doesn't mean, I am not saying that miracles do not take place.

They do. And I mean bonafide, defy the laws of physics miracles take place all the way down to the present day. But they still serve the same biblical purposes.

And unless you can point to this episode and say, I am a commissioned ordained messenger of God and in order to convince the public that I am that, God performed this miracle in the presence of these witnesses. If you can't say that, don't put yourself in that category because that's arrogance. And you have misrepresented and misunderstood, maybe innocently so.

But what do we take the prophets as an example of? What did they do? A, they spoke in the name of the Lord. They are public professors. They are public prophesiers.

They are public proclaimers of a word of God to God's people. But what do we take them as when we look at them? Examples of suffering and patience. Not, well, I am kind of like them.

And when I talk, it's like bullish on America. Everybody hushes and listens to me. That's typically not the case.

They are our example of two things. Even though they were speaking in the name of the Lord, for us they are an example of enduring abuse, enduring bad circumstances and patience. Patience.

Be patient. You have need of patience so that after you have suffered, you inherit the promises. Not you impress everyone with people dropping dead around you.

I actually had the Ananias and Sapphira thing brought up to me. This person thinks, you know, I've had people in my own family. Just had the conversation yesterday, the day before.

And, well, you know, my in-laws dropped dead because I got mad at them. And I thought, you know, be careful. This is a real caution.

They are an example of suffering and patience. We count them blessed who overcome. We count them blessed who pronounce a curse and down they fall.

We pronounce them blessed who invoke, call down fire from heaven. Remember, even the

disciples that were with Jesus wanted to call down fire on the Nerdwells there and Samaria and so forth. What did Jesus say? Don't be thinking in those terms.

You're my witness. You're not my rod of correction. You're not my hit man.

God's hit man. We count them blessed, not who invoke the power of God for the destruction of evil, who endure. We account them blessed who endure.

You've heard of the perseverance, the patience of Job. And you've seen the purpose intended by the Lord. It says the end there in your New King James.

That's end in the sense of purpose. That the Lord is compassionate and merciful. It is not the destructive emanation of God's power that is in view.

It is the Lord's compassion and mercy. We are here to be reflections, to be communicators, to be examples of God's compassion and mercy. Not God's day of the Lord, judgmental presence and power.

The Lord Jesus Christ is going to come back and do that Himself. We're not called to that. But above all, my brethren, do not swear by heaven or by earth or with any other oath.

This, once again, is the hubris of invoking heavenly things to puff yourself up. To make yourself large. Animals do this.

Cats do this. Why does the cat get its hair all sticking out and it scrunches up this way? It makes itself look big. Puffer fish do this.

Skunks turn around and do this. And that's your last chance to light fuse, get away. Do not swear by heaven or by earth or with any other oath.

Let your yes be yes and your no be no. If you haven't established credibility by your life and by your example and by the pattern of your behavior, saying by heaven, by Jove, by the gold of the altar and so on isn't going to lend any credibility. It's only going to diminish further.

Lest you fall into judgment. And if you start invoking the things of God to back up your words, there is a judgment for that. Beyond the failure you're going to experience in this life and in front of this audience, you're going to be back with the judge standing at the door.

And he's not coming in saying, wow, that smells good. What are we having? It's going to be something else that is roasting. So then in verse 13, this is the background.

This is the context, context, context, context. Verse 13, chapter 5, James. Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.

Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. These are exercises of the soul, right? Singing isn't just noise coming out of your throat. Singing, when you do it right, is an expression of your soul.

This is why it doesn't really matter how tuneful you are or lack thereof. The most beautiful music I've ever heard are people in my own immediate family singing. It's the greatest thing I've ever heard.

I would rather hear that than any album in my collection, any noise I can make on an instrument, because it's an expression of soul. And when I hear those songs, it is a blessing. Prayer and singing is a reflection and an expression of soul.

So, if you're down, express your soul. If you're up, express your soul. In what direction? Toward God.

We are spiritual creatures. Don't be down in the physical world. Well, when I get down, I get my Grand Funk Railroad album out and do the locomotion.

I feel so much better. Well, when I'm down, I put on a Bach staccato and fugue in D minor, and it just energizes me. There was a time when I was frustrated and I would put on the toccata and fugue.

That's a powerful piece of music. If you crank it up to 11, record it on a really good organ, there's a reason why they put it in movies with Vincent Price and so on. It's a powerful piece of music.

But think about this. If you're suffering, pray. If you're cheerful, sing.

Both of these are directed toward God. If you're experiencing blessing, if you're in a time of prosperity and advance and fruitfulness, and you see the power of God at work in your life as a benefit, be sure and express that. Songs, hymns, spiritual songs, singing and making melody.

How? In your hearts to the Lord. Singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord. That's the definition of music.

Everybody, rock, Christian rock, is this music, is that music, praise music, 7-11 songs, is this music, is this worship? It's not the sound, it's not the words, it's the heart that is expressing it. And to each his own. If you're suffering, pray.

Express the soul. David even made music when he was suffering. Look at Psalm 21.

Look at the penitential songs. Look at the expressions of, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Coming out of David's soul when he was suffering. But it's an expression toward God.

He is our Heavenly Father. We are His people. We are His children.

We are related to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ in a special and unique way. And whatever is going on in our lives, our soul should be expressing itself back to Him. Now, if you find yourself going day after day after day, and you're having ups and downs, and good days and

bad days, good times and bad times, and accomplishments and lack thereof, but you don't find yourself turning to the Lord in thanks or turning to the Lord in appeal, if you look over the last two or three days, let's say since Wednesday, and you think, you know, did I really turn to the Lord and thank Him? Did I really turn to the Lord and appeal to Him? Did I enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise? Was I thankful to Him? Did I bless His name? Did I come before Him like a child to His Father and say, I've got trouble.

I want to lay it before you. I want your answer. Do I endure? Do I fix it? Do I lean on someone else? You know, I need some guidance here.

If we are not turning to God the way we would turn to our most significant other, you are spiritually ill. There is something wrong with you because you are a child of God. If you're listening to the sound of my voice, I promise you, you are a child of God or you wouldn't be here.

And if you are not related to God in that way, if you do not pray when you suffer, if you do not sing to Him when you're blessed, there is something wrong with you. And it is serious. The judge is standing at the door.

You are responsible for what you know. You are accountable for the gifts and the blessings that God has given. And what's not to like about this situation? Why would we not? It's because we're easily led away.

We have a short attention span. I was telling Ken this morning, if I was going to be a superhero, if I was going to put on a cape and have a thing on my chest, be distractible boy. Nope, it's a bird, it's a plane.

No, it's distractible boy. Well, I understand you've got a fire here. Oh, what's that? Is your computer not working? Squirrel? Yeah, squirrel.

We need to remember who we are and why we're here. And it's important. It's not a choice.

It's a mandate. It's not an option. It's an imperative.

Pray. Sing. Turn.

There was a great song. I don't hear it as much as I used to anymore, but turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face.

And the things of this earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. That's what James is talking about here. Compare that to Stenazzo.

Compare that to, well, I'm going to rattle a door. I'm going to break a vase. I'm going to make pictures fly off the wall.

I'm going to make something happen. I'm going to invoke an oath. I'll make an issue out of

myself, and I'll strut around with my fists on my hips and really make sure people know that I'm here and that I'm upset.

Look at the contrast. If you are suffering, don't find somebody to yell at. If you're cheerful, don't do something frivolous.

We are God's people. We are God's children, and it ought to express itself in that way. Well, that brings us to verse 14, and this is the focus of our study.

This is where Elijah comes in, but Elijah has been in everything we've looked at from verse 9 forward because he has done the good and the bad of all of this. And we're going over this ground in James because when we go back to Kings and look at the remainder of Elijah's career, you're going to say, oh, so that's why James mentioned Elijah. That's why this is here.

Not as a passage to claim for miraculous healings and rubbing people with oil and so on. That's why James brought that up. So that's our goal.

We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll pick up in verse 14. We'll take our final course through this, and this is going to really plow the ground for the remainder of Elijah and the introduction of Elisha that we're going to see in our study of kings and prophets.

Let's take our break.