

In God's Training School

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[0 : 00] Well it is a privilege and joy to be here this morning, though there was a moment at about 10 o'clock when we wondered whether we would make it. The manse was besieged by thousands and thousands of people.

The entire road in which the manse is situated was packed with people, about to start on a 10km run. And I gather 15,000 runners, some of them may even have finished by now, who knows, set off on this great adventure.

For me, it was a very good beginning to the day because as the minister and I worked our way through the thousands and thousands of people that packed the road, I reminded myself that I wanted to talk to you this morning about the difficulties of swimming against the tide.

And it was a very vivid reminder of what that is like. Two of us, both in our suits, on our way to church, and 15,000 people in their running kit about to travel their 10km.

It was a vivid reminder of what it is like to be different. We are in the year 870 BC. Already 130 years after the reign of King David, and 60 years since the Kingdom of Israel was divided into two.

[1 : 24] We are in the Northern Kingdom, the kingdom that is called Israel, based on the capital city Samaria, ruled by King Ahab and his foreign consort Jezebel.

And things seem to be going swimmingly. This new government that Ahab has brought in really does seem to be making the land prosperous. There is a new popular religion, it is called the worship of Baal, the god of Tyre and Sidon whom Queen Jezebel has imported into Israel.

And the Israelites over the centuries have flirted with this sort of idolatry. But now Baal is firmly established as the foundation stone of a new liberated nation.

Baal after all is the god of fertility. He brings prosperity to the fields and the flocks. He is the god of rain, the giver of life.

And his worship, characterized by ritual prostitution and sexual license, celebrates life and vitality. He is the god of the land, an earthy, earthly god.

[2 : 34] And at last they can throw over the old restraints and the disciplines of the Lord, the god of their fathers, with all his laws and controls. All that Ahab and Jezebel convinced the nation that belongs to the past.

Nobody has seen this god or heard about him for a long time. The old ways and the old code are dead. And their proponents are irrelevant.

Everything is going Ahab's way. And yet. Just look at the page before the passage we have in front of us at chapter 16 verse 30.

Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord. More than all who were before him. And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that's the sins of idolatry and worshipping foreign gods.

He took for his wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him. He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria.

[3 : 43] And Ahab made an Asherah, that's a shrine for Baal's consort, the female goddess. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

He did his evil in the sight of the Lord. And when God sees, he prepares to act. He provoked the Lord to anger, more than all the kings before him.

And now suddenly at chapter 17 verse 1, everything is disrupted. Without any introduction or any pedigree, a man called Elijah bursts onto the scene.

He comes, we're told, from the hill country of Gilead across the Jordan. His name means, the Lord is my God. And Elijah is a long way from the pseudo-sophistication and wealth of Ahab's court in Samaria.

He bursts into the king's palace with a devastating prophecy in verse 1. As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.

[5 : 01] He comes from Tishbe and Gilead, but he comes from God. He is the messenger of the Lord. And he comes on behalf of the true God of Israel, the living God, who rules the land and rules the people in spite of Ahab and Baal.

And with God's authority, as God's servant, verse 1, the one before whom I stand, he comes with a word about judgment.

A word of drought, which he claims is actually God's word. There will be neither dew nor rain these years, except when I say so.

Now we need to see what's happening. The battle is joined. The agenda is determined. What Elijah is announcing in Yahweh's name, in the Lord's name, is a direct challenge to Baal.

Who is the God who has power in Israel to accomplish his will? Which God actually rules the so-called forces of nature?

[6 : 07] And who is in charge of Israel? Their trendy idols, the Baal shrine, the Asherah, or the living God? Now, at first, it's very easy for us as 21st century Christians to focus all our attention on Elijah and to build him up in such a way that we say he's a wonderful hero of the faith, but actually he's totally alien from us.

He becomes an impossible icon. We admire him, but we say, I could never be like that. But I want you to notice that there are two principles that we need to remember before we look at the detail of the story.

We reflected on them a little yesterday in our Bible training day. The first is that God is the hero of all the Old Testament stories. Not the human actors, not Elijah, but God.

And the big question we need to ask whenever we come to a story like this is not how can I identify with one of the characters of the story, but what is God teaching us about God here?

The New Testament frequently provides us with a key to understanding the story more fully. And the second point that we need to notice about Elijah is that he is never built up in the Bible as a great hero.

[7 : 27] Later on in the New Testament, James in his letter, chapter 5, verse 17 says, Elijah was a man just like us. The Greek word is homeopathes. It means that he had the feelings of an ordinary human being.

He was not a superhero. He was a man just like us. And yet James goes on to say, Unlike so many of us, he prayed fervently.

And it did not rain on the earth for three and a half years. So the drought that he declares in chapter 17, verse 1 of 1 Kings, is the answer which he is trusting God to give to his fervent prayer.

The reason why Elijah can do that is because he knows that God said centuries earlier, when he gave the covenant law and the covenant promises to Israel, that if Israel was faithless to him, his judgments would come in order to turn them back to trust in God.

And that one of those judgments would be drought. If you just turn back in your Bible to Deuteronomy chapter 28, we can see it in front of us. Deuteronomy 28, back about 100 pages or so.

[8 : 43] And look with me at verse 15. Deuteronomy 28, 15. If you will not fully obey the voice of the Lord your God, or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

Now this is not God in a fit of bad temper, venting his anger on his people. He is saying, I will withdraw my blessing, and when my blessing is withdrawn, curses are what follow, and they are the inevitable consequence of rebellion against me.

Look at verse 16. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall you be in your basket and your kneading bowl. You see he is talking about the crops failing, about there being food shortages.

Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb, and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds, and the young of your flock. Infertility. Cursed shall be you when you come in, and cursed shall be you when you go out.

Now these curses that were given by God were all in terms of their physical life and the land, because that was the sphere in which God was dealing with them. But if you look to verse 23, you'll see it's even more specific.

[9 : 52] And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under your feet shall be iron, and the Lord will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down, until you are destroyed.

Now God means what he says, and Elijah's prayer is based upon what God has already revealed he will do. Elijah is so moved by the idolatry and the rebellion against God, that he asks God in his fervent praying, to send the drought.

And because he is convinced that God has called him to go as the prophet, because God has put his word in his mouth, he can go and declare the drought in faith, that God will keep that covenant word, even though it brings distress to the nation.

Because God knows that that is the only way sometimes, that people like us respond to his word. Now with those basic factors in place, let's come to the detail of the text.

We are not going to try to pretend that we are Elijah. Obviously it is not a story that we can put ourselves in his shoes. Now this story is not teaching us to expect visiting ravens to come, as an alternative to Asda or Tesco or whatever.

[11 : 12] But knowing that Elijah's God is our God, and that what we learn about God here we can take into our lives for this coming week, that is what we want to see. What is God teaching us about God in this story?

Now often in Old Testament stories like this, there are bookends which mark out the beginning and the end of the story, and which give to us the clues as to what is important in between.

So here in verse 1, As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word, Elijah is claiming to speak for God.

Look at the last verse of the chapter, verse 24, And the woman said to Elijah, Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.

So we have a claim from the prophet who has just arrived on the scene, this is the first time he has ever spoken of in the Bible in verse 1, and a testimony from a Gentile woman in verse 24, that what he claims really is true.

- [12 : 17] See the theme? The theme is, can you trust what Elijah says as the man of God? Because ultimately, can you trust the God of the man?

Can you trust God to do what he says he will do? Is he the God who makes and keeps his promises? And that is the issue that Israel has to face.

It is the issue that we all have to live with on a daily basis. Why has Israel gone after Baal, worshipping the false gods? Because they no longer trust that God's word can actually be relied upon.

Why do you and I have secret idol shrines in our lives that we worship at, that are not worshipping the Lord Jesus, but being diverted into all sorts of other things, that are at best secondary and sometimes contrary to his purposes?

Because we don't really believe that the word of God can be trusted. We don't really believe that God makes and keeps his promises. And so this chapter is a great faith building chapter.

- [13 : 16] Not surprisingly, the passage is controlled and governed by the word of the Lord. You see that in verse 2, the word of the Lord came to him. You see it in verse 8, the word of the Lord came to him.

And again in verse 14, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel. Now the chapter is made up of three related incidents and we will look at each of them briefly.

Firstly in verses 2-7, by the brook at Cherith, where Elijah in God's training school, learns that God's word can be depended on. Then in verses 8-16, in the house of the widow of Zarephath.

And then in verses 17-24, the restoration of her son to life. It's a progressive sequence of lessons in God's training school for the prophet Elijah.

And it can be so for us too. Look a little more closely at the structure of the incidents. And what strikes me immediately is that God's word controls everything that happens.

- [14 : 18] And in each of the three paragraphs, you will find the same pattern is repeated. This is really significant the way it's been put together. Obviously so that we can learn this spiritual principle. The pattern develops is that God says something first of all.

He gives the divine word. Secondly, the human being in the story responds to that word. Not simply by saying I believe it, but by acting on it.

And thirdly, there is a supernatural intervention from God that changes the situation. So there is a word from God, a response of faith and obedience, and a divine commitment to the person who is addressed.

Let's see how it works in the first part of the story, by the brook at Cherith. You'll see the word from the Lord is there in verse 3. Depart from here, turn eastward, hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.

It's a distinct command. And it's a very useful command because you can imagine that Ahab's reaction to what Elijah has just said is going to be extremely angry. So God says, I want to preserve you, my prophet.

- [15 : 27] Put some distance between you and Ahab. I want you in a secret place, hidden away by a brook east of the Jordan. But the command is accompanied, as commands always are in the Bible, by a gracious promise.

God never commands without giving a promise. And here is the promise, verse 4, you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.

Will you notice that the promise has a divine ingredient which is beyond all usual human experience. Now this is the way God deals with us.

This is how he grows our faith. He gives us commands in scripture, and he gives us promises, but the promises always involve a stretching ingredient. That stretches faith.

It nurtures faith and strengthens faith, but faith has to be stretched. You see the promise says, I have commanded the ravens to feed you there. Oh really?

[16 : 32] You expect me to build my life on that? Well that's the question, isn't it you see? Do I really believe the word of God, or do I not? Easy to sit in church and say I believe it.

Not so easy to be by the brook Cherith on Thursday, waiting for supper from the ravens. But that is the way that God governs and grows his people. By putting us into situations where we have to be more dependent on him, not less.

Now thirdly you see that the response to the command and the promise is trust, revealed by practical obedience. Verse 5, so he went and did according to the word of the Lord.

He went and lived by the brook Cherith, that is east of the Jordan. So he doesn't just say, Lord I believe your word and do nothing about it. The mark of real faith is always obedience.

And what you do is you believe the promise so that you obey the command. You see if you are not obeying the commands of God in your life, it's because you don't really believe his promises. If you believed his promises, you'd obey his commands.

[17 : 37] If you knew that he is a God that you can depend upon, you'll go his way and follow his will. Whatever you're dealing with in your life at the moment, if there's some crisis or some challenge maybe that God has brought into your life, let me say to you that the mark of reality in Christian discipleship is that we go on believing the promise and we do that by obeying the commands.

See when Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac, he didn't know what God was going to do about it. He knew he promised that Isaac would be the son of the promise and that all the nations of the world will be blessed through Abraham's offspring.

And yet he's told to sacrifice that very son. What does he do? He goes on obeying the command, trusting that God will somehow supernaturally fulfill the promise.

And of course his faith is justified. It's faith that is counted as righteousness. And that's what happens in every situation through the Bible. When God speaks promises and commands, the mark of believing the promise is that we obey the command.

Jesus says, repent and believe the gospel. How do I know I believe the gospel? By repenting. That's how it works. And the outcome then in verse 6 is the miraculous provision of God.

[18 : 51] And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. Because God, you see, providentially controls and governs his creation.

He fulfills his word, and he provides for his servant. Not a varied diet. The sort of meat delivered by ravens would need to be well washed and carefully cooked, but enough to keep him alive.

A sort of ornithological meals on wheels, really. Or perhaps meals on wings is the way to describe it. Well, that is what God is like. If he says he's going to do it, he'll do it.

Until verse 7, and after a while, the brook dried up. Because there was no rain in the land. And at this point, you see, the natural provision failed.

The supernatural provision of the ravens didn't fail, they kept coming. But now there was no water. Because the drought is on the land, and Elijah shares the outcome of the drought.

[19 : 58] So in that first little picture, you see, the principle is clear, isn't it? The brook and the unclean birds, the ravens, are both parts of God's created order, and everything operates according to his word.

The ravens keep coming, but the brook dries up, because the word is a word of drought, and yet a word of supernatural provision for Elijah. And when the brook dries up, there's no miraculous spring.

Rather, there is another word from God to stretch his faith further. A journey now, outside of Israel, to the area of Sidon, which was Jezebel's territory, the heart of the pagan worship of Baal.

So let's follow him into the second picture. Verse 8, Then the word of the Lord came to him, Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.

See the same pattern? A distinct command, go to Sidon, Zarephath, and a word of promise. I have commanded a widow there to feed you. Now this is even more unlikely.

[21 : 02] Here is a woman who is a widow, she is likely therefore to be poor. She is a pagan, living in a pagan environment, as far as Elijah knows. But she is commanded by God.

Because this God, the God of Israel, is in control of the whole world. He rules the whole earth according to his sovereign will. Well, it may be safer to be in Zarephath.

Ahab, we know, has search parties out. In fact, chapter 18 tells us that, looking for Elijah to take his life. But it's a risk, isn't it, to go into pagan territory.

Is God really in control there? Verse 10, So he arose and went to Zarephath. Obedience. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there, gathering sticks, promise fulfilled.

And he called to her and said, Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. See, faith obeys and puts God's word to the test.

[22 : 05] And as he gets there, he finds that the word holds up. Because God has said what he's going to do. So at the very gate of the city, he meets the widow and he requests some water and some bread.

And she recognizes him as a Hebrew, probably by his speech or by his appearance. And she uses the very form of words that Elijah had used to Ahab right at the start of the chapter.

She says to him, verse 12, As the Lord your God lives, that was how Elijah introduced himself to Ahab, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug.

And now I'm gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son. It's our last meal because the drought is affecting Sidon as well as Israel. That we may eat it and die.

Hugely ironic, isn't it? As the Lord your God lives, does he live? Well, it doesn't seem as though Baal lives, does it? Baal can't keep his people alive.

[23 : 07] Is God able to do what Baal can't do for this widow? As for anyone else, Baal has no answers for her. All she can look for from her pagan worship, verse 12 tells us, is death.

And that's of course all that idolatry will ever give anybody. Death. But there is a word from the Lord which offers to transform the situation.

And now you see that the pagan widow is faced with the same challenge that Elijah was faced. Because Elijah gives to her God's word and he says, verse 13, Don't fear, go and do as you've said, but first make me a little cake and bring it to me.

Now there's the stretch of faith. Are you going to do that? Well, you'll only do that if you believe the promise. If you use your meager resources to feed this man from Israel, you may have nothing left for yourself.

But look at what the promise says with the authority of the God of Israel, verse 14. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, the jar of flour shall not be spent and the jug of oil shall not be empty until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.

[24 : 15] Now are you going to believe it or not? Verse 15, she went and did as Elijah said. So she has a command and she has a promise.

And by God's grace, this widow woman obeys. After all, God has commanded her to feed Elijah. He's at work in her life. He's drawing her to put her faith in him. And she starts to trust him.

And she begins to obey him. And the outcome is supernatural intervention. Life and fulfillment in terms of a daily miracle. What Ralph Davis calls the quiet daily drama of the jar and the jug.

The jar of flour shall not be spent. The jug of oil shall not be empty. Verse 16. And it happened that way. The jar was not spent. Neither did the jug of oil become empty.

According to the word of the Lord. A daily miracle of provision. That he spoke by Elijah. Don't be afraid, he says. Trust him.

[25 : 16] Obey him. And she proves God's faithfulness and dependability through his word. Until the third element.

And here the challenge is even greater. Verse 17. After this, the son of the woman became ill so severely that there was no breath left in him.

And in the death of her son, it seems now as though the whole process is reversed. Not surprisingly, trust and obedience give way to anger and bitterness. Verse 18.

What have you against me, O man of God? You've come to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son. What she means is, I have a sense of guilt as I've been receiving these good things from God.

I'm more and more aware of how unworthy of them I am. And now I see what you've come to do. You've come to bring judgment into my house. For this God must be as capricious as the pagan idols.

[26 : 15] You thought, I thought you were coming to bring me life. But you've cruelly punished me for my sins. And now instead of a word from God to Elijah.

Elijah speaks his own words to God. And he has two parallel petitions in verses 20 and 21. He takes the dead boy and puts him on his bed up in the upper chamber.

And he cries out in verse 20, O Lord my God. And again in verse 21, O Lord my God. O Yahweh, faithful covenant Lord, my God.

And as he calls out to God asking him to have mercy on the woman. Not for this calamity to destroy her son. But for the child's life to come into him again.

He stretches himself upon the boy. Typically in a symbolic way, this is not magic. It's an acted plea to ask God that the dead cold body of the son.

[27 : 12] May become like the prophet living warm body. What an incredible prayer of faith that is. O Lord my God. Let this child's life come into him again.

It's as though he's saying, Lord, you alone are the giver of life. Baal and his idols and the devil that stands behind them that has trapped people into idolatry.

All they can do is kill and destroy just as this child's life has been taken from him. But you are the life giver. You are the only true and living God. You are the one who can raise this child to life again.

You gave him life originally. Lord, let that life return to him. What an amazing statement of faith that is, you see. He was a man just like us.

And he prayed. And in that pagan stronghold, the Lord restored the life that he'd originally given to the boy. It's as though God is saying, there is no area on the surface of planet earth where I am not God.

[28 : 16] There is no barrier to my sovereign power. Even death itself has no power against the God who lives. And who lives eternally with his own unending life.

And so the miracle happens. He revives. He takes the boy down, delivers him to the amazed mother. See, your son lives. And she replies, Now I know.

Now I know that you're a man of God. And even more important, I know that the word of the Lord, as you speak it, is truth.

This pagan woman, you see, has learned total dependence on the God of Israel. Giving everything that she has, so that he can provide everything that she needs.

She gave that little bit of flour, and that little oil to make the cake for Elijah. She gave the drink of water to him. And now God gives to her, far beyond anything she could ever have imagined.

[29 : 18] The supernatural intervention is way beyond the experience of faith and obedience. And she'd learned what we all have to learn.

That in the end, all we really have to rely on is God's word of promise. But that is all we ever really need. And on that word of promise, we can cross from time to eternity.

In confidence and in faith. Well, these miracles happened uniquely, and largely, I think, to grow and sustain Elijah's faith.

In chapter 17, he's learning what he needs to know about God. So that in chapter 18, when there is a public showdown on Mount Carmel, as to whether Baal is going to send the fire from heaven, or Yahweh the living God.

When Elijah stands against the hundreds and hundreds of prophets of Baal, swimming against the tide, he is rock solid in his convictions. Because he's learnt in the training school what God wants to work out in the public arena.

[30 : 29] He learns it firstly alone in hiding, then in the heart of Baal's territory that would be so threatening, and ultimately in the face of death itself. That when God promises and commands, He fulfills those promises, and sustains His people through His living word.

And he is teaching Elijah that the word of the Lord is truth, and that it is the Lord of that word that alone can give us life.

Elijah needs to know that at the deepest level of his being, because that is what his ministry to Israel is. And if God gives you a ministry to other people, He will work that ministry into you first in the training school.

He will teach you those things, so that you can live them out. And as you live them out, communicate them to others. If God is calling you to a ministry that calls other people to have faith, and He certainly calls all Christians to witness to the Gospel, then don't be surprised if He puts you through faith-testing situations.

Because that is the only way you will know that your faith is strong. If we are going to stand against the idolatry of our generation, as we proclaim the Gospel in a hostile climate, if we are going to swim against the tide in 21st century Scotland, then we need to be people who are convinced about the reality of God's word.

[31 : 51] And He will put us in situations where we only have that word to depend on, so that we learn that we need nothing else to depend on. The miracles were special proofs to Elijah of that, and special proofs to us.

Calvin comments on this, God is the author of all our blessings, but some have specially evident marks. And that was what was happening here, specially evident marks. Special evidences that happened in Scripture when there was special need for them, and that God has used down the centuries to encourage faith in His people, when we are up against it, and we wonder, does He have the power?

So let's take away from this passage this morning, conviction about the truth of God's word. He controls the rain, He controls the brook, He controls the ravens, He controls the flow of the oil, and the provision of the flower.

He controlled the life and death, and the resurrection of the widow's son. He is the sovereign Lord of everything. And you and I are never more secure and never more blessed than when we are totally dependent on Him.

So if God is in the business of knocking some of the other props away in your life, at the moment, don't see that as negative. That is not evidence that He doesn't love you. That is evidence that He's working faith in you.

[33 : 09] Because the only thing that you can ultimately depend on is the promise of God, confirmed by His character. But if you've got that, you don't need anything else to rely on.

For the word of the Lord gives life, eternal life. And everything we need is in Him alone, and revealed to us in His word alone. So when Baal is challenged by this Lord in the next chapter, chapter 18, he won't even turn up.

He won't turn up because he's dead. And so are all the other gods that are raised against the living God. And yet Old Testament Israel persisted in looking for life in all the wrong places.

And sometimes I think that the New Testament Israel, the Church of Jesus Christ, and me personally, it's true that I'm not much better than they are. But friends, we have a Lord who has conquered death in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.

His Son lives! We have Gospel promises, and we have the commands of Scripture to trust and obey Him. We have throughout the 66 books of the Bible, the word of the living God that brings life.

[34 : 20] But the challenge as we go out into a new week unknown to us in many of its details, in a culture that largely regards our God as irrelevant or even dead, the challenge is where will you go looking for life this week?

Will you go to God's word? On your knees? Or will you run your own show, your own way, on the road that must eventually lead to drought and to death?

It's the same essential challenge throughout human history. So I want to end this morning not in 9th century Israel, but in 1st century Nazareth, 1st century AD.

And I want to turn you, as I conclude in just a moment, to Luke chapter 4. Perhaps you'd like to turn there into the New Testament part of the Bible. Luke chapter 4. This is where we're going to end.

Verse 22. Jesus is in the synagogue in Nazareth. He's just claimed that all the prophecies about the Messiah in Isaiah are fulfilled in Him.

[35 : 24] And we'll pick it up at verse 22. And all spoke well of Him, and marvelled at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth. And they said, Isn't this Joseph's son?

The carpenter from down the road. And he said to them, Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, Physician, heal yourself. What we heard you did at Capernaum, do in here in your hometown as well.

And he said, Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land.

And Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, only Naaman the Syrian. And they heard these things all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.

[36 : 26] And they rose up and drove him out of the town, and brought him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.

Isn't that fascinating? What's it saying? It's saying, if you don't trust God's promise, he will take his promises somewhere else. He will give them to other people.

If we in the West turn our back on the Gospel as we are doing, that Gospel will spread around the world, in all sorts of other places. For it is the word of the living God. If in my life I am choosing not to believe God's word, and not to follow in faith, and to obey his commands, all I am doing is setting myself against God, full of wrath very often, and anger against him perhaps.

I'd like to throw him out of my synagogue. I'd like to see him go down the hill, and forget all about him, so that I could live my life my way. But God will go on giving his word to people who will receive it.

Just as Jesus came, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repent. So what will he find in us? He didn't find much faith in Nazareth that day.

[37 : 38] But what about as he looks at our hearts this Sunday morning? Is he going to find people who say, Yes, God has taught me that he is dependable. He did it in Jesus, supremely in his death and resurrection.

He did it as a foreshadowing in Elijah's ministry. He turned the tide in Israel. In the next chapter the people cry out, The Lord, he is God. Though the number who actually believe that is always small, God is at work in our world and in your life.

And he wants us this week to hold on to his promises and to obey his commands. Let's pray.