

## **Broken Prophet, Gracious God – 1 Kings 19**

### **Introduction**

Most of us will go through moments in life where we feel utterly broken. You might be feeling a little like that tonight - discouraged, depressed, distressed at the circumstances you are having to endure.

Around 6 years ago in my second year of bible college I went through a brief period in which I felt broken by my circumstances. During the first half of that year I could feel myself becoming increasingly overwhelmed by the pressures of life and study.

But it all came to a head when we moved in to a new rental house in Greensborough. Now this move would probably have been stressful in any normal circumstance for me, but there were just a few other factors that broke me about this moment. For example, this move coincided with a Hebrew exam at college that I was having to stay up late studying for.

There was also a bible talk that I had to prepare for the following week. Our only daughter at the time was going through the terrible 2's and needing more time and attention. And on top of all of this, the house we moved was just kind of dirty and grimy (there hadn't been a proper clean before we moved in). And so, we spent any spare time we could get scrubbing walls, windows and floors. I remember thinking what have I got us all into here? How did I ever think it was a good idea to move house at this point in life? But the straw that broke the camel's back came was in one of those late night cleaning sessions. I had decided to pull the oven forward in the kitchen to see whether we needed to clean behind it. What I saw was a sludgy thick mess of decades worth of grease and dust. When I saw that, together with the exasperated look on Ruth's face (as she saw it too), I broke. I slumped down onto one of our kitchen chairs, threw my face into my hands and just wept. In that moment, I was more than willing to echo Elijah's words in verse 4: "I have had enough Lord!"

When I think back to that second year of Bible college, I often think, “that was the year that broke me.”

I know that there are some of you hear tonight, who know what it is to be broken. Some of you I know, have walked much longer and harder paths than the one I just described. But the truth of the matter is that most of us will probably go through a period of feeling broken to some degree – where we despair of life itself, and feel like we just can’t go on. In those kind of moments we need to know that God has actually has a heart that cares for his people and is willing to help.

And it’s that heart of God that we see in this passage tonight. It shows us the grace and kindness that God shows towards his servant Elijah when he brakes down in despair and distress. And, though, Elijah is in many ways very distinct from us in his role as God’s prophet, we should not think that God’s gracious attitude towards Elijah is something that is out of reach for us. The book of Hebrews makes it clear that God is gracious to us too in our moments of need:

*<sup>16</sup> Let us then approach God’s throne of **grace** with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find **grace** to help us in our time of need.*

The God who shows grace to Elijah in this passage, is the same God who shows grace to us in Christ today. So what I want to do is think through 4 particular ways that God gives grace to his broken servant in this passage – He sustains Elijah, He listens to Him, He makes promises, He provides help.

## Context

So first some context – What happens to Elijah at the start of this passage?

Well, you might recall from last week that Elijah had enjoyed quite the victory. Elijah had gone head-to-head with the prophets of Baal over which god Israel should worship as the true God. And Elijah's God, our God – Had won spectacularly.

Where Baal's prophets called out repeatedly and without success for *their* god to do *show* himself in some way, Elijah simply offers up one prayer asking God to show his power and immediately and spectacularly God sends fire from Heaven on Elijah's soaking sacrifice.

So in the aftermath of all this, things are looking pretty promising – God is shown to be the true God to the Israelite spectators. The wicked prophets of Baal are destroyed. You get the sense that even the Baal-worshipping Ahab, who witnessed this, kind of seems convinced... Things are looking up for Elijah. There is a palpable feeling that a spiritual revival is about to ensue in Israel.

But that feeling is quickly squashed at the beginning of our chapter when queen Jezebel, hears from Ahab everything that happened including the execution of her prophets of Baal. Tragically, instead of repentance, Jezebel seeks revenge. She sends Elijah a message that basically says, when I find you, I will kill you.

Now verse 3 we read that Elijah "was afraid and ran for his life." But I think a better translation of this verse probably reads: "Elijah saw and ran for his life" (And you might have that footnote in your bibles, and you can speak to me about that afterwards). What difference does the word *saw* make over and against the word *afraid*. Well, I think it's actually quite crucial for explaining what state of mind Elijah is actually in throughout this passage. If we

simply think it is *fear* for his life that is driving him, it's hard to make sense of the fact that he is perfectly happy for his life to be taken from him in verse 4. What I think is actually going on with Elijah is that he is completely discouraged and broken by the fruitless response he “*sees*” in Jezebel's response. He wanted revival in Israel, but when he *sees* her stubbornness that has obviously influenced Ahab, He's convinced that nothing has changed in Israel and his ministry has been a complete failure. And it brakes him. That's why he cries in verse 4:

“I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”

I think Elijah runs for his life – not in order to save it, but to deny Jezebel the satisfaction of taking it. That's why he heads down into the southern kingdom of Judah, into the middle of no where and says to *God* – You take my life – I've had enough. I don't think Elijah is primarily driven by fear here, but brokenness – someone who is totally discouraged by yet another display of rejection to the God He loves and wants Israel to love to.

So, how does God respond to his broken prophet? God responds with those four acts of grace and tenderness. So let's think about the first way God shows grace to Elijah.

### **God's Response – 4 displays of Grace.**

#### **1. God sustains.**

First, God's *sustains* Elijah in his brokenness.

When we are overwhelmed, discouraged and broken by life, it's often our natural default to think we simply can't go on. That's how I felt that night at the kitchen bench. I'm sure many of you have felt like that.

- My study or my job is overwhelming, I can't go on.
- My marriage is so hard, I can't go on.
- My loneliness is so discouraging, how can I keep living like this?

One thing is very clear in this passage, Elijah feels like *he* can't go on, and yet God in his grace, keeps him going.

You see it there in the middle of verse 5b. An angel of the Lord comes to Elijah, when he's lying down in the middle of nowhere and places a hot loaf of bread and jar of water right beside him and says: "Get up and eat."

God sustains Elijah.

And he does it a second time doesn't he. Verse 7:

*<sup>7</sup>The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."<sup>8</sup> So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>9</sup> There he went into a cave and spent the night.*

Now, I'm going to speak about the significance of where Elijah is travels to soon (because it is significant), but for now, I just want you to see the first way God is showing grace to his broken servant here. He sustains him (keeps him going) when he is at his weakest point.

This, I think is a reminder to us that God is both willing and able to sustain us when we are at our lowest. He keeps us going when we think there is nothing left in the tank.

Now that doesn't mean all your discouragement and despair will evaporate overnight, God doesn't promise that, and even Elijah wasn't freed from his despair (it's clear that he's still quite a broken man when he speaking with God on the mountain later on). What it does mean, is that by God's grace, He gives you the power to endure through periods of life that you might otherwise think you couldn't endure.

I suspect many of you have experienced this actually. Times in your life where you think, I don't know how I kept functioning under so much grief. I don't know how I survived under so much stress. I don't know how I endured through that broken relationship. God sustains his people in their brokenness – He helps us to keep going in our faith and in our life.

God gave Elijah strength when he needed it. And the NT affirms that He gives strength to us too through the Spirit of Christ in us. The apostle Paul is affirms this when he says: "I can do everything through *Him* [Christ] who gives me strength." Paul was confident that he could endure through all sorts of situations not because he had a high view of himself, but because he had a high view of Christ' power at work within him.

God in His grace sustains Elijah, and He sustains us.

## **2. God listens.**

The second act of grace that we see in this passage is the simple fact that God *listens* to the cry of his broken servant.

You know someone cares about your pain, when they're willing to hear about it. And the opposite is true. If someone doesn't really care, they won't want to hear about it.

I remember experiencing this contrast in care and attention in the aftermath of being physically assaulted in an unprovoked attack. On the one hand I had my boss at work, who in the following days kindly came to check on me and wanted to know all about what had happened and how I was getting on. On the other hand, I had the doctor who I was told I had to get checked out by, who groaned when she saw the amount of paper work the police medical forms required of her. One person seemed ready to listen, the other seemed ready for knock off time.

God, in this passage is ready and willing to hear Elijah out. Notice that he gives him two different opportunities to unload the burdens on his heart. It's like my kind boss who cares and was ready to listen.

When God asks Elijah in verse 9 and then verse 13: "what are you doing here" it's not so much a rebuke to Elijah as it is an invitation for him to cry out to God.

Now why do I read God's question in vv. 9 and 13 as an invitation to talk and not a rebuke? Well, if we take it as a rebuke, we would have to assume that God is in some way displeased that Elijah had travelled all the way from Israel to Horeb. It would be like God is saying, "why are you all the way down here, and not up in Israel doing your job!?"

But, actually the words and actions of the angel in verse 7 suggest that it was *God*, who directed Elijah to Horeb and God who made sure he had enough energy to get there.

God's question, I believe, is an invitation to pour out his heart and state his case against Israel. And I actually think that is why Elijah is directed to Horeb and the mountain of God. This was the place where God entered into a covenant relationship with Israel and made her His own people and treasured possession.

Elijah is being reminded that God takes his relationship with Israel seriously. It matters to Him when they ignore Him. He is grieved by their idolatry. In bringing him to Horeb, God is saying "You are free state your case to me because I understand your grief."

And Elijah doesn't hold back when God gives him the green light to talk does he? Look at what he says in verse 10:

*<sup>10</sup> He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."*

Elijah is broken not primarily because his life is in danger but because the God he loves has been so utterly despised by the people that he saved and entered into relationship with. You see it there in his words. Your covenant rejected. Your alters torn down. Your prophets put to the sword.

Now, we'll have a think in just a moment about what God has to say in response to this, but the point I want to highlight right now, is the simple fact that is God is willing to hear cry of

his broken servant. In His kindness, God says, “Go ahead, spill it, I’m listening, and I understand.” God isn’t distant or indifferent. He wants to hear the cry of his people. This was true for Elijah in this unique moment and it’s also true for us in our brokenness.

The Apostle Peter tells Christians who likewise are in relationship with God to:

*<sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him [God] because he cares for you.*

When you feel broken in some measure, do you take up the invite and the privilege to unburden your heart by speaking to God about it?

I really didn’t like my last couple of years of high school. In fact I would say that I struggled a lot during that time. My parents, of course, knew this and it mattered to them because I mattered to them. I remember my Dad would get home from work every day and ask the same question: “how was school today?” And every day I would respond in the same way: “good.”

My Dad, who cared, was ready to listen, and inviting me to speak. But in routinely fobbing off the question, I actually missed out on experiencing a lot of the loving care and attention He was prepared to give. Instead of relating to my Dad and unburdening my soul, I held it all in, and that didn’t do me any good. Don’t be like that with God. Be like Elijah and be honest with Him in your brokenness.

God in His grace listens to Elijah, and He will listen to you to.

### **3. God promises**

The third act of grace shown towards Elijah is found in the words of promise that God speaks to him. Elijah has spoken with God. God now responds to Elijah.

But notice first the way God prepares Elijah for his response. He tells him in verse 11 to stand on the mountain, because the presence of the Lord is about to pass by.

But interestingly, God's presence is not in the spectacular display of wind, or in the terrifying earthquake (v.11) or even in the consuming fire (v.12). God's presence comes in the gentle whisper of his word. Moses had experienced something similar in the same location centuries earlier. God had said his presence would pass by him, and when it did so, what happened? God's voice spoke – declaring God to be compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love, and yet not leaving the guilty unpunished..

But it feels like an anti-climax right – I mean, we can look at the wind, earthquake and fire and think, Yes! That's the kind of God I want... One who comes to us in spectacular displays of power. A quiet word just seems a little lacklustre in comparison. But that is what God gives Elijah – and to us. If we want to find God, if we want his help for our brokenness, it will be found in his word of promise. Elijah had witnessed the power and fire of God at Mount Carmel, but Israel had not responded in the way he had hoped. It is actually only in God's word that Elijah will find true hope in his brokenness.

So what does God promise to Elijah in his word?

First, God promises Elijah that Justice will be done against the rebellion and wickedness that has flowed from Ahab and Jezebel. That's what all that anointing is about in vv.15-16. God

says that Hazael will become king over the kingdom of Aram, Jehu, king over Israel and Elisha will succeed him as prophet. God says that together these guys will bring the sword of God's judgment against the idolatrous house of Ahab.

*17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.*

Elijah is being reassured by God that justice *will* be done. And in 2 Kings 9-10 you can read about how those names fulfil this promise and put to death the house of Ahab's and the remaining prophets of Baal.

God is promising justice to Elijah, but secondly, God is promises grace for Israel. Look at verse 18:

*18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."*

Part of the reason Elijah is so broken is because he thinks all of Israel is basically lost to idolatry at this point!" But God says to him, "all are not lost, in my grace I reserve 7000 who will continue to worship me, not Baal."

God is telling Elijah, “In your brokenness, take heart in my promises of justice and mercy. I know you feel like the bad guys are winning, they won’t. I know you think that all is lost, it isn’t.” Hold fast to my word of promises in your brokenness.

There is a scene in Bruce Almighty, where Jim Carey’s character, Bruce stands out in the rain absolutely broken by the loss of his job, and disappointment of his life to that point. In his frustration he starts yelling at God, “You’re the one who should be fired, for not doing you’re job! Answer me!”

And I think that scene really resonates with people because in our hardships it’s easy to believe God has no interest in us and refuses to speak. We long for him to speak into our pain like he does for Elijah.

But what the author of Hebrews reminds us is that for God does continue to speak to us - but that he does so in Jesus Christ. If we want to know what God’s answer is to our brokenness and suffering, we need to listen to His word to us in Christ.

As you listen to the word of Christ in the Bible you hear promises that speak of our forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus’ death for us. Promises that speak of our eternal life and a renewed creation. Promise that reassure us of Christ’ presence in our pain. Promises that reassure us of God’s ultimate justice at the judgment day – a day in which every sin and evil done against us and others will be accounted for.

Which of God’s promises do you need to be hearing in your brokenness and trial?

- When you’re devastated by a bad diagnosis and worried about your life Christ is telling you that your life is safe with him and that he will raise you up again?

- When you're feeling angry and devastated by the injustice and sin you have experienced at the hands of others Christ is telling you in the Bible that He will bring every evil deed to account on the last day?
- When you're feeling grieved by your own sin and repeated failure, Christ is telling you, that you are forgiven as you trust in Him and will one day be freed from that grievous power and presence of sin in the new creation.

In Christ, God does still graciously speak his promises into our brokenness.

#### **4. God provides.**

The final act of grace that we see shown to this broken prophet is the provision of Elisha to Elijah. His young man is both a ministry successor and a ministry support. God provides help. I don't know if you've ever experienced the joy of a faithful co-worker coming on board.

One of the greatest blessings during my time as Bundy's Youth group coordinator was when the Lord raised up Andrew Wort to serve alongside and then succeed me in that position. I found YG coordination in these early days of BY rewarding, but often quite tough. And that's why I was so happy with Andrew came on board. He was someone who was a great support and encouragement to me. And he had clearly had a passion and gift for sharing the gospel with teenagers much more than I did. I was blessed because I knew that when Andrew took over YG coordination, this ministry would not simply continue, but by God's grace it would thrive. And it has. Andrew was a wonderful grace to me in my ministry to Bundy Youth. In our time of need, God will often give us just the right provision to help us.

Elisha was a gracious provision by God to Elijah.

Elijah had lamented the fact that he was the only prophet left in Israel – In Elisha this would no longer would this be so.

Elijah had lamented the fact that his ministry was a failure – In Elisha, it would continue, God's word would keep being proclaimed. Elisha is a devoted and faithful servant. That comes out in the last section of this passage. When Elijah finds him working on the family farm and signals his desire to bring him into ministry by throwing cloak around him (v.19), Elisha follows him straight away (v.20). He cuts all ties with his former life in order to set out on a new life of service with Elijah. He gives his mum and dad a farewell kiss. He burns up his ploughing equipment and cooks up the oxen for his the locals to eat. Elisha's makes clear to his family and community that he is no longer a farmer but a servant of God in the ministry of Elijah.

*Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.*

In God's grace Elijah received a faithful servant and successor in Elisha.

God often provides for us in our time of need by bringing other faithful people into our lives. Brother and sisters who will encourage us, who will support us, who will serve alongside us. I've found this to be the case, time and again in my life and ministry. Paul found this to be the case with his gospel co-worker Timothy – In Philippians 2 Paul says he has “no one else like Him.” (Phil 2:20).

God graciously gives us each other in our Christian lives. He provides us with a community who are called to love and serve one another. There is one particular guy in my life, who I

know I can always go to in difficult times. At the beginning of Bible college this guy basically told me, I want to help you through this experience. I'm here to encourage you and support you in your marriage, family and ministry. He has been a great blessing to me. And so, if you are struggling, feeling a little broken, come and talk with me. We want to support you. We want to help you, so that you're not on your own.

God in his grace provides us with help in others.

### **Summary**

1 Kings 19 gives us an insight into God's grace to his broken servant. He sustains him. He listens to him. He speaks words of promise to him. He provides help.

Now, the way in which God shows us grace may look different to Elijah, we are not a prophet with a specific role like Elijah. But if you are a follower of Jesus, you can be assured that in your times of brokenness that God will likewise graciously sustain you, listens to you, speaks good promises to you and provides for you. And if you doubt this, you simply have to think upon God's love and grace towards you at the cross. You have to think, if God was prepared to send his Son to the cross for me, will he really fail to show me grace in moment of need? As Paul says in Romans 8: 32:

*<sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, **graciously** give us all things?*

I've been reflecting on that moment at the kitchen bench throughout this week. And I've been thinking how would I now respond to a similar moment. Because I could easily see myself getting crushed in a similar way at some point in the future.

Well this chapter has reminded me, that next time I'm that broken, I need to remember God's grace to me in that moment.

- He will sustain me – Christ will give me grace help me to endure.
- He will listen to me – I don't need to simply suck it up, or push through, I can talk with God. I can be honest and with him and ask him for help. He cares and wants to hear me.
- He speaks words of promises to me in Christ. Jesus has saved me from my sin and this broken world. He is bringing me to a glorious day where I'll be free of stress, and a sense of failure.
- He provides for me – He's given me a community to encourage and support me.

In his grace, God sustains, God listens, God speaks, God provides.