

Elijah

Part 2

Ravens

1 Kings 17

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Last time we looked at how Elijah was consumed with the with what he saw was happening to his country and his people and how, eventually, he dropped the news of an impending drought to Ahab and then instructed by God to move to the Kerith ravine. In this message we look in particular at the way in which God cared for Elijah there.

Personal Words

God told Elijah that He had ordered ravens to feed him there while he was in hiding. On the face of it that was a very unusual thing to hear. It's so unusual, in fact, that Elijah might well have been excused for not believing that he was hearing God at all. It's just that he was praying and praying and praying at the time and that lifestyle causes the person who prays to draw closer and closer to God. In that closeness God's voice becomes familiar like the voice of a close friend to whom you talk often. So, as strange as the idea of ravens air lifting food might seem, Elijah was prepared to put it to the test because he had become familiar with the sound of God's voice – and anyway, there was no-one to discuss it with as far as Elijah was concerned as he believed he was the only one of God's prophets left alive.

Over many years in the Christian faith I have had people say they have “a word” for me. I have to say that when words come from someone who I know spends a lot of time praying, I'm inclined to listen with care. Even then, I like

to think about it especially if it could have far reaching effects. Before making a major decision based on a “word” that someone has given you, pray for some confirmation so that it comes from more than one direction – especially if acting on it will affect more people than just you. Look for scriptural confirmation and, where possible, check it out with someone you can really trust.

The Choice of Unclean Ravens

Going back to the idea of ravens bringing food, whilst Elijah just seemed to run with it my feeling is that others not walking as close to God as Elijah was would not have been so happy with such an arrangement and may have preferred God to send some chickens to lay eggs.

First, there unless I’ve missed something, there’s no precedent in scripture of birds bringing food to humans on a twice-a-day basis (and that would give some people a problem). Not only that but, in the Law of Moses we read that not only is any kind of raven an unclean bird not to be eaten but is also called “detestable”. In fact, ravens would fly over battlefields and feed off dead soldiers, they would feed off dead bodies hung on gibbets and, according to Proverbs 30:17 would pluck out the eyes of sinners. So, some would not accept the arrangement as being from God because God would not use what was unclean and detestable to do His will – and particularly those horrible black ravens – and as I just said there was no scriptural precedent in the Bible for ravens doing that *and so some would say that the whole idea was unscriptural.*

Biblical Silence

Now, let's stop there a moment because that approach to scripture has been commonplace for years and is a wrong application of the Bible. As detailed by Rick Joyner in his excellent book "The World Aflame" about the Welsh Revival published by Morningstar Publications he makes it clear that the scriptures were given to free us to do whatever is not specifically forbidden, not to keep us from doing things which aren't mentioned in them. Christian believers are given the freedom to choose to do whatever is not specifically forbidden in the New Testament and whether the choice is good or not is judged by the fruits which result. It doesn't mean that everything we choose to do will turn out to be right, but as we walk in the Spirit more and more and our thinking becomes more and more aligned with the mind of Christ it is likely that what we choose to do will be increasingly in line with what pleases the Lord. The scripture doesn't tell us how to arrange the seats in our homes but that doesn't mean our seating arrangements are unbiblical. We are free to choose and if we, and others who sit there, feel comfortable with the choice then the fruit is good. If something is unlawful it's something which is forbidden by or contrary to law. The Bible is a kind of law book and if something is unbiblical it's something forbidden by or contrary to the scriptures.

It's surprisingly easy to fall into the trap of trying to prove or disprove issues on the basis of "Biblical silence". For example you hear this sort of argument:- "Where does it say anything in the Bible about having catchers in meetings to catch people if they fall backwards when receiving prayer? The Bible doesn't teach we should do it therefore the practice is unbiblical!" It's an incorrect approach to scripture and we just need to watch that we don't

use the Bible in that way. Interestingly, the Pharisees used a Biblical silence argument John 7:52

52 They replied, "Are you from Galilee , too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee ." NIV

(However, the Bible may not be as silent on that as they thought because of the prophet Jonah. In 2 Kings 14:25 we read the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher. NIV. Gath Hopher is not far from Nazareth - even if it wasn't called Galilee at the time. So, actually, there is a view that they got it wrong)

Well, going back to God's choice to send food via detestable unclean ravens, surprise, surprise, God can do what He likes, say what He likes, go where He likes and use whom He likes even if it offends individuals who think He should do otherwise.

Examples of God Using Those who Some Thought Were Detestable

In the eyes of His opponents, Jesus was detestable.

Matt 13:54-57

Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. 55 "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? 56 Aren't all

his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" 57

And they took offense at him. NIV

Luke 23:2

"We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king."

NIV

29 "We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. " John 9:29-31 NIV

The Lord said:-

'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." John 15:20 NIV

History shows that where there is any move of the Spirit of God, the Pharisees show up and try to oppose it. It's particularly so when God decides to use a "raven" to carry food to His people and people reject it because they don't like the delivery boy.

Evan Roberts of the Welsh Revival.

The ordinary people of Wales loved Evan Roberts but he managed to upset lots of different power groups and there were accusations that he was satanically motivated. Chapel Leaders, and others all found something in

Evan or his message to hate and they tried their best to break him. Although the fruits of the revival were lost in Wales were lost through criticism, it had an impact worldwide as many come from other countries to take the anointing back – According to Rick Joyner, a sure sign of revival is that the anointing transfers.

William Seymour of the Asuza Street Revival

He was a black man whose parents had been slaves. He was blind in his left eye and was used significantly in the revival. Despite the obvious outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the empowering which it brought, William Seymour endured bitter criticisms from Christian opponents. They hated William allowing what they saw as unbridled religious enthusiasm in the meetings, the emotional worship and the mingling of whites and blacks together which some found deeply offensive. He wasn't perfect and revivals are new things which God seems to birth in stables. Historically, revivals tend to be messy and there's always ammunition for the critics but it's sad that a man such as William Seymour had to face the venom which was thrown at him by other Christians.

John Wimber had his share of criticism from Christians and so did John and Carol Arnott but God chooses whom he wants to lead Holy Spirit outpourings and we need to sure that we don't reject the resulting goods because we don't like the look of the delivery boy. Those goods from God might fly right on by and be dropped somewhere else where the raven is more welcome.

Obedience of Creatures

One of the notable things about this passage is that fact that while Elijah was praying continually, God controlled bird life and the birds actually did what God commanded them. Isn't it interesting that a bird is more likely to be obedient to God than a human being – who has a choice and is often inclined to choose to do the opposite? As far as we know, there was no form of raven training. God says “Pick up food and drop it there” and they do it. I don't know how we as humans could even train a raven to do such a thing.

It's hard enough for us even to train a dog to do what we say. While on dogs:-

I had a client who made accessories for cars. The products were excellent in quality, they were market leaders and in big demand. I always enjoyed seeing the client as he was a person who had worked hard to build a successful business from small beginnings. It was one of those success stories. The client was also a dog enthusiast and one day, after a meeting, he walked me to the company car park as I was about to leave. When we got to the car park he opened up to rear door of his estate car and out jumped two super pedigree dogs. They both wandered around the car park as we continued talking and then the client said to me “Watch this”.

He then said gently to one of the dogs “Fido, in the car”. (The names of dogs have been changed to protect their true identities!) Fido looked up, walked to the back of the car and jumped straight in. I said to the client how amazing it was to see the dog jump in just like that. The client explained how the dogs were trained to be obedient and that it just needed one word from him. The other dog was walking around further away. Looking at the other dog, the

client gently called “Bonzo, in the car”. Bonzo just continued to walk around sniffing the ground. Calling a bit louder this time the client said “Bonzo, in the car”. The dog came a bit nearer and then walked in a circles in the car park. Getting embarrassed the client said quite loud “Bonzo, get-in-the-car now”. The dog came quite close but just sniffed around having no intention of jumping in. Finally, the exasperated client bent down and yelled at the dog “GERRIN THE CAR!!!!” Bonzo just took off and jumped in the car mighty quick.

I wonder how God must feel when animals are more prepared to obey him than most humans.

It wasn't the only time that God exercised authority over wildlife which obeyed without question. He caused frogs and locusts to harass the Egyptians. He closed the mouths of lions in the days of Daniel and positioned a fish to swallow Jonah. The Lord drew fishes together to be caught in the sea of Galilee and caused one to pick up a coin to pay temple tax and to get in position to be caught by Peter so that the coin could be retrieved. The fact is God is prepared to do what's necessary to accomplish His work and he can even move animals around to do it. Moreover it's not the only time in history that Ravens have been recorded as delivering food. This is from Schaff's History of the Church (but I'm not sure if it's absolutely true or just a legend).

The first known Christian hermit, as distinct from the earlier ascetics, is the fabulous Paul of Thebes, in Upper Egypt. In the twenty-second year

of his age, during the Decian persecution, A.D. 250, he retired to a distant cave, grew fond of the solitude, and lived there, according to the legend, ninety years, in a grotto near a spring and a palm tree, which furnished him food, shade, and clothing, until his death in 340. In his later years a raven is said to have brought him daily half a loaf, as the ravens ministered to Elijah. But no one knew of this wonderful saint, till Anthony, who under a higher impulse visited and buried him, made him known to the world. After knocking in vain for more than an hour at the door of the hermit, who would receive the visits of beasts and reject those of men, he was admitted at last with a smiling face, and greeted with a holy kiss. Paul had sufficient curiosity left to ask the question, whether there were any more idolaters in the world, whether new houses were built in ancient cities and by whom the world was governed? During this interesting conversation, a large raven came gently flying and deposited a double portion of bread for the saint and his guest. "The Lord," said Paul, "ever kind and merciful, has sent us a dinner. It is now sixty years since I have daily received half a loaf, but since thou hast come, Christ has doubled the supply for his soldiers."

(from Schaff's History of the Church, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 1999, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Finally:-

Arabians?

It has been suggested by some that the term Ravens in this passage should have been translated as "Arabians" or "Merchants" and that it was humans and not birds which brought Elijah food. After all, merchants traveling to Egypt from Gilead picked up Joseph and so they did pass that way. God could

easily have guided humans to where Elijah was hiding just as well as he could have guided ravens and humans would have brought food in a state ready for Elijah to eat. Against that it is suggested that Elijah was in hiding and God guided Elijah to a place where humans wouldn't find him. After all, if they could, Ahab could. Also, if it's a reasonable substitute it should also hold good in other places where ravens are mentioned in the scripture but it doesn't.

For example it wouldn't make sense to say in Gen 8:6-7"... that after forty days Noah opened the window he had made in the ark 7 and sent out an Arabian...."

Neither would it make sense to make a substitution in Deut 14:12-14 so as to read "But these you may not eat: the eagle, the vulture,the black kite.....or any kind of Arabian". NIV

So, don't be too quick to believe alternative suggestions which remove the supernatural working of God in the scriptures.

We'll look some more at Elijah in the next message.