

Elijah - a Friend of God

by Major Ian Thomas

Becoming a friend of God involves recognizing His authority and doing as He says, which allows us to experience righteousness and to fulfill our purpose as believers.

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Scripture: 1 Kings 17:1

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Description

Major Ian Thomas emphasizes that Elijah was a friend of God, illustrating how one becomes a friend through obedience to God's commands. He highlights that true authority comes from submission to God's will, and that living a miraculous life is possible when we allow God to work through us. Thomas encourages believers to recognize their role as vessels for God's divine activity, stressing that the Christian life is not a mere religion but a dynamic relationship with Christ. He concludes by affirming that being told what to do and doing it leads to meeting other friends of God, creating a life filled with divine adventure and purpose.

Transcript

But I'm glad that he's been raised from the dead and is once more reasonably articulate. Great, it's good to be back. Good to see old friends and special greetings to those of you who are in Bible school.

This is really just one of the weeks of your time here at His Hill. The only difference is that being Thanksgiving, we have the privilege of entertaining a number of friends who come and join us so that together we can share the Lord Jesus. And I know my wife is as happy as I am to be here also.

We're still almost only getting over the excitement of the new center that is in embryo now in Costa Rica. And Marco Perez, who will be directing that work as a Costa Rican, just went back or will be going back tomorrow. And he was with us over the past weekend in our annual general meetings.

And I'll probably have the opportunity of telling you a little bit more about that in the course of the week. But it's the first permanent torchbearer gateway to Latin America, Spanish speaking, Central America and South America. Not forgetting, of course, those who speak Portuguese.

We'll soon be celebrating Christmas. You probably know that if nobody's mentioned it before. But it'll give countless thousands of people an opportunity to get drunk.

That's about all that Christmas means to the vast majority of people in this country and all our westernized, Christianized nations who know little, little about the Lord Jesus himself or why he was born the way he was and what he came to do and did. But of course, for those who know him personally, we're profoundly thankful for that day when God stepped out of eternity in a time, came from heaven to earth, and a little baby was born at Bethlehem. Biggest thing God ever said was that he was born again when the word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

What did you know about Mary, who by divine conception was the mother of that little baby boy when she's first introduced to us in the first chapter of Luke's Gospel? What did you know about her? Nothing. You don't know what her dad did. You don't know where she lived, save that it was in a city of Galilee, Nazareth.

You don't know what school she went to, how she excelled, how she may have distinguished. You don't know anything about Mary. God did.

He called her to that ministry to which she then was committed. What did you know about that little boy off the hillside? His dad really didn't think he was significant enough to introduce him to Samuel when God had commanded him to anoint a king in Israel. But God said, among the eight sons of that Bethlehemite, I got a king.

You're introduced to him in the 16th chapter, the first book of Samuel. What do you know about him? Nothing. Nothing.

Save being introduced, we're told that he was unusually handsome. God knew him and called him. And being called, finally he was chosen as Mary was.

He to prepare the way in anticipation of that event when that little baby was born at Bethlehem. God laying the stage all down the centuries. Magnificent.

Go back a little farther. What did you know about Abraham? When God called him a Chaldean, who when his father Tereh died, was told by God to forsake his own country and his own people and go to a land that God would give him. What do you know about him? Until you're introduced in the 11th and 12th chapters of the book of Genesis.

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. God did.

That of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob of the tribe of Judah in the city of Bethlehem of the house of David, a little baby should be born. The one who would bring to fruition that first proclamation of God of all that he intended to do in that little baby boy born at Bethlehem. Rebutting Satan in the day that man fell, he said, I'll put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed.

The seed of that woman is gonna bruise your head. He'll destroy you. In the process, you'll bruise his heel.

He'll hang on a Roman gallows on a little hill outside the city of Jerusalem, Calvary. What do you know about Abraham? Nothing. God did.

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, looking, looking, looking, looking, looking, that he, God, might show himself strong on the behalf of those whose hearts are perfect towards him. Not some boy, girl, man or woman who could claim sinlessness. That isn't a perfect heart.

For there is none righteous, no, not one. God in heaven could look down on none since Adam fell, save one of whom he could say, good, very good, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. But God had an eternal purpose to implement that he proclaimed in public for the first time when he rebuked the devil in the day that man fell.

For the Lord Jesus was the lamb slain before the foundation of the earth. He was born dead on schedule, according to plan. As, of course, he'll return dead on schedule, according to plan.

And I've got a very strong suspicion that you and I are going to be among those who will be alive and remain at the return, the coming back of our Lord Jesus. What a day that'll be. Could be this week.

Could be before another day dawns. That's how near I believe we are. In some ways, I hope he won't come before next weekend because I've got some interesting things I want to talk to you about.

Now, I'd be prepared to forego that. And I'm sure you would if the Lord Jesus chose to come. But what I want you to understand is that what happened at Bethlehem didn't happen by chance.

It wasn't just an isolated event in history. Something God thought up, as it were, an emergency and introduced it. It was fashion of the heart of God before ever the world was.

Peter took an awful long time to find that out. But finally, in the first chapter of his first epistle, not redeemed with such corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious, precious blood of God's dear sons of a lamb without blemish, verily foreordained before ever the world was, manifest in these last times for you who now by him do believe in God. Born again, raised from the dead, alive again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the living everlasting word.

This is the word which by gospel is preached unto you. So what did you know about Elijah before he is introduced to us in the first verse of the 17th chapter, the first book of Kings. 17th chapter, the first book of Kings.

What do you know about him? Nothing, absolutely nothing. But we're gonna talk about Elijah this week. One of God's friends.

So if you've got your Bibles with you, as I anticipate you have, we're going to break in to the unfolding of God's redemptive and regenerative purpose that was brought to its glorious consummation in that day when Jesus born, lived his sinless life, accomplished that reconciling act, triumphed over death and sin and hell and the devil himself and being restored to life by that life that he alone possessed and he laid down on the cross, laid the foundations upon which you and I may be reconciled to a holy God, acquitted and accepted in the beloved and ourselves be restored to life as he then was. Alive again. First verse, 17th chapter, the first book of Kings.

And Elijah, that's what it says in the King James. And what was good enough for Paul the Apostle is good enough for me. And Elijah.

And when you read that, you might pause and say, and who? And God would say, Elijah, who's he? Never heard of him. You see, and Elijah, I mean, that's bad grammar. You never start a sentence with a conjunction.

That's bad. If you see and Elijah, you must have been talking about all kinds of other folks, this, Jim, Tom, Dick or Harry and Elijah. He's introduced by conjunction.

Suddenly strides onto the pages of biblical history. You don't know whether he was a Southern Baptist, a Presbyterian, a Methodist, a Plymouth brother, Protestant or Catholic. I mean, it isn't even respectable.

Just a conjunction. All we know is that he was a Tishbite. And he might've been a Fleabite for all we care.

Who's he? God would have said, one of my friends. I've known him a long time. I don't have to tell you about all my friends.

I've got a whole bunch of friends that you've never met. A whole bunch of friends that you've never even heard of. And a whole bunch of friends about whom you'd be very shocked if you knew they were my friends.

But then you see, God says, I don't have to tell you why they're my friends, nor do I least of all have to ask you for your permission that they might be my friends. Elijah, one of God's friends. God introduces him with a conjunction because he was simply part of God's history and part of God's conversation with man.

From the time that God made public his remedial measures in redemption and regeneration the day that Adam fell, he began that conversation that found its final consummation when the word was made flesh, the biggest thing God ever said. When the word who was in the beginning with God was God by whom all things were made, the creative deity without whom nothing was made that was made in whom is that life that alone is the life of men that gives man the moral capacity to fulfill the function and assignment for which he was created in everything he does and says and is clothed with that humanity in which you and I were intended by God to give a physical, visible and audible expression of an invisible God so that all creation looking at man would know what God was like. From the day that man fell and forfeited that incredible privilege, reneged on his assignment, God's been in conversation and Elijah was part of God's conversation.

And you see a conjunction simply joins different sentences, utterances within the same context and Elijah. The Tishbite, who's of the inhabitants of Gilead said unto Ahab, as the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand, there shall not be June or rain these years but according to my word. And your first introduction to this man might not give to you maybe too good an impression.

You might consider him to be from what he had then to say, to be somewhat arrogant, self-apprehensive, opinionated, loud-mouthed, throwing his weight around, standing by the king. As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand, there shall not be June or rain these years but according to my word. But you'd be wrong if you thought that was any evidence of arrogance on his part.

As the Lord God of Israel liveth assures the God of Israel is alive. A fact that some of you folks said he to them and the king in particular, you have forgotten. The God of Israel is alive and he is my God before whom I stand.

He's fully cognizant of where I'm standing at this moment. He's fully cognizant of the one to whom I address myself. He's fully cognizant of what I'm saying and I'm fully aware of that fact.

I'm very careful about what I'm doing, where I am and what I'm saying because it is before the living God of Israel that I stand. And only in that authority that derives my submission to his authority dare I tell you

what I have to say. As we shall discover true authority derives from a man's submission to God's authority.

There's no other authority that any human being on earth has the right to exercise. I don't mean just in the poop. I mean as a mom or dad in the home, business, manager, downtown, a school teacher.

There's only one legitimate authority that any boy, girl, man or woman has the right to exercise on earth and that is the authority that God vested in man when he placed all things under his control but only by virtue of man's submission to God's authority. And it's this authority that here Elijah is invoking. As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand, there shall not be dune nor rain these years but according to my word.

And the word of the Lord came unto him saying, get thee hence, turn thee eastward, hide thyself by the brook Cherith that is before Jordan. And it shall be that thou shalt drink in the brook and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. And verse five tells you how man becomes God's friend.

He went at God's command and did according unto the word of the Lord. That's how you become one of God's friends. Nothing more complicated than that.

You're told what to do and you do as you're told. You know what happens when by God you're told what to do and having by God been told what to do, you do what God told you. Do you know what happens? God behaves.

God behaves. You're placing your humanity to clothe his divine purpose and intent. He fleshes his will out in terms of your behavior because you're yielding obedience to the one who has the right.

To put you where he wants you and give you his instructions in anticipation that you'll do exactly what he tells you. Then God behaves. Do you know what that's called in the Bible? Righteousness.

There's no other source of righteousness. All righteousness derives from the one who is righteous. And there's only one who is totally righteous and that's God himself.

That's why Philippians in chapter one, verse 11, tells you the fruits of righteousness. And remember, fruit springs from life. If it doesn't spring from life, it's artificial.

You've got to pin it on. And that kind of righteousness that you have to pin on because it isn't fruit that springs from life has nothing in itself that enables it to reproduce. Nothing.

That's why the quality of righteousness that derives simply from conformity to pattern, being squeezed into a certain religious mold never reproduces. It's sterile. Sterile.

Only that quality of righteousness reproduces in others that has its source in life. That's why the fruits of righteousness are by Jesus Christ. Because in him was life.

That life was the light of man. That alone, his life, gave to man the capacity to reproduce his quality of life, righteousness. Because man was created to be inhabited by his maker.

And subject to his supreme jurisdiction as king in that which the Lord Jesus said was his kingdom. The kingdom of God said he is within you. And that's where the king has the right to be.

And being in the place where he has the right to be has the right to reign. To tell you what to do knowing that you'll do as you're told because you have an ambition in your heart to fulfill that function for which God created man, advertised deity. Then God behaves.

That's how you become one of God's friends. I wonder if you're one of God's friends. In other words, the human vehicle of his divine activity.

You don't have to be all that smart. You don't have to have a whole bunch of theological degrees around your neck. You don't have to be unusually gifted.

If you are, thank God, he may or may not use it. Depends how dangerous it's going to be to you. Because those who are unusually gifted normally are the last who are prepared to let God be God in their lives because they think they've got it all tied up.

They've got it made. You're God's friend. What I mean is this.

Have you settled for the fact that you're going to be now as a human being to the Lord Jesus as God, what he, assuming our humanity, was prepared to be 2,000 years ago to his father as God? The Lord Jesus, for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for the 33 years he was here on earth, allowed the father to behave in the son. And that was righteousness. That's why when the father looked at the son, he could see himself behaving.

That's normality. He that has seen me, said the Lord Jesus, has seen my father. So if those who saw the Lord Jesus saw the father, quite obviously the father, when he looked at the Lord Jesus, saw himself.

That's normality. That was the purpose which you and I were created with the human vehicle of his divine activity so that he in us might be the author at all times of all we do in saying, ah, we fall tragically short of that because we've never come to grips with that purpose for which God created us, nor the overwhelming provision that he made by his indwelling for us to fulfill that function for which he made us. The Lord Jesus understood that.

That's why assuming our humanity, he made himself totally available to his father and only exercised that authority that derived from his submission as man to his father's authority as God. And as we shall be discussing in the course of the week, he wasn't demonstrating thereby that he was God, he was demonstrating thereby that though God, he was playing the role of man. That though the creator, he was prepared for your sake and mine so to humble himself that he could play the role of creature.

Didn't have to. He could have stayed in heaven, let us all perish. But didn't.

Because he was in total agreement with his father and the Holy Spirit and the triune Godhead when they decided to love a dirty, sinful, rebellious world and introduced measures where any boy, girl, man or woman who'd be smart enough would enter into the good of God's provision. How do you become God's friend? You're told what to do and you do as you're told. In other words, as I've discussed with many of you on many occasions, you're sent and you went and you're put.

And when you're sent and went and put and you know who sent you, it's God who puts you and when it's God who puts you, nothing can frighten you. You can stand in front of the king, talk to him, to his face. There's going to be neither rain nor dew in this land except by my word, did you hear? He heard all right, that's why God told him to a bunk quick and hide.

He said, get thee hence, turn thee eastward, hide thyself by the brook Cherith that is before Jordan. That's how you become one of God's friends. You recognize who God is, that he has the right to say what he does, means what he says and the only intelligent thing you can do is to take God seriously and do as you're told.

Then your life becomes a miracle because it will be limited not by what you are, but by what he is. Not what you can do for God, which is nothing, but what God can do through you, which is everything. All he needs is a few friends.

Who are prepared to be part of God's history. How do you meet God's friends? Very simple, you're told what to do and do as you're told. And you'll meet somebody else who's been told what to do and doing as they're told.

Because God organizes that, that's the body corporate. That is that new body the father presented to the son on the day of Pentecost, when the risen savior came to re-inhabit the humanity of 120 men and women who at his command were waiting to be raised from the dead. That's what happened at Pentecost, 120 men and women at God's command waited to be raised from the dead.

Because if a man is born dead and comes alive again, resurrection has taken place. And the Bible tells us that since the fall of Adam, all of us without exception have been born dead, alienated from the life of God, dead in trespasses and sins. And the one thing that a dead man needs is resurrection.

That's why the Lord Jesus came into this world. He said, I'm come that you might have life. The only people who need life are those who are dead.

And a Christian is somebody who's been raised from the dead. Somebody who's been re-inhabited as creature by the creator so that once more he's magnificently furnished by the presence of his maker within him as the source of all his activity, what he does and says and is for that assignment for which he was first created. And now has been redeemed and regenerated.

You and I have entered into the good of all the remedial measures that God introduced when that little baby was born at Bethlehem. Only when the totality of our being, body, soul, spirit, mind, emotion, and will, we're wholly sold out to Jesus Christ as the creator within the creature. Anything else is totally irrelevant.

It may be involved. We may be in business. We may be a doctor, maybe a nurse, maybe a mother, maybe a school teacher, maybe a bricklayer.

That all may be involved. But the only thing that has any relevance for eternity is that activity within whatever vocation God puts you has its origin in the creator within the creature. Anything else is wood and hay and stubble.

And it'll go out in flames and leave you in a heap of ashes. No matter how much Bible you know, no matter how much Bible verses you've memorized, no matter how active you may be in some religious engagement, if your humanity doesn't clothe the divine activity of an indwelling resurrection Jesus, then you missed it. You've got a totally false concept as to what the gospel's all about.

As I've told you probably a thousand times, or a thousand one, Christ didn't come to get you out of hell into heaven. That's absolutely incidental. It's gloriously true.

He's the only one who can do it, but he didn't come for that purpose. He came to get God out of heaven into you. So that on God's terms, you can once more become functional in being the human vehicle of his divine activity, told what to do, you do as you're told, and God behaves.

And the world in you sees his righteousness. And if you're told what to do and do as you're told, the chances are you'll meet somebody who's been told what to do and is doing as they're told, God's friend. And when one of God's friends meets another one of God's friends, you can always see God behaving, God in action.

Something's going to happen, which will be essentially exciting. This is the miracle of the Christian life. Nothing sensational, nothing spectacular, but those divine providences that are the birthright of all who are prepared to exercise that authority that derives from their obedience to God's authority, who are prepared to be told what to do and do as they're told, that mosaic, that perfect pattern that implements the divine plan that was fashioned in the heart of God before ever the world was.

How exciting being part of the action. How exciting being part of God's plan. How exciting being one of God's friends.

Average Christian doesn't know a thing about this. He's reduced his Christianity to a formula. So many visits to a piece of religious real estate every week, so many dollars in the plate, one or two tracts given away for which he'll be extremely proud because of his commitment to evangelism.

Knock on a few doors and that's it, period. Even if they go that far, and even such are considered somewhat fanatical. There was nobody more fanatical than Jesus Christ.

The moment he assumed your humanity and mine and born at Bethlehem, he was so fanatical he allowed the Father as God, actually be God, 24 hours a day, clothed with his available and sinless humanity. That's fanaticism. But Jesus said, as my Father sent me, so send I you.

Nothing was relevant in the life of the Lord Jesus to him other than that which the Father did. I do only those things that please him. In other words, 24 hours a day, born as I was, concede of the Holy Ghost, assuming man's humanity, I'm expendable.

Until finally he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Not just the death of a noble martyr. He didn't simply pay the price of somebody too progressive for his age.

He incurred in his person all that had already occurred in man and through Adam in the whole human race and accomplished at infinite cost the means of our redemption and spiritual regeneration. He was told what to do. He did as he was told.

See, the body of Christ is an integrated corporate whole, just as our bodies are. The Bible uses that as an illustration. 12th chapter, the first epistle of Corinthians.

The Lord Jesus is the head of that body which you and I are members in particular. There are no professionals among the members of my body. They're members of my body because they possess my life.

They're subject to my jurisdiction and in measure are told what to do and do as they're told unless they're sick, paralyzed, suffering from some vitous dance, or infected. But any healthy body is an integrated

whole. All the individual members of the body subject to one head are motivated into action which integrates each into a common purpose and accomplishes the purpose of the head.

That's what it means to be a Christian. Integrated by a spiritual new birth into that body corporate called the church in which Jesus is the head and of whose life every individual member is the recipient so that each, governed by the nervous system of the body, the presence of the Holy Ghost, who instructs us to do what the head wants us to do, we each yield obedience and find ourselves in a perfect harmony of common action. Marvelous.

But that's normality. I mean, that's the real thing. And we've got accustomed to something tragically less than that and we've settled for it.

But we may be eternally thankful for those who all down the history of God's redemptive and regenerative purpose were part of his conversation and through whom he was able to accomplish that divine end that brought finally our Lord Jesus to this earth at the right place at the right time, dead on schedule, so that you and I could enter into the good of it in 1991 and be ourselves caught up into the eternal, timeless purpose of a God who knows exactly where he's going and knows that he's gonna get there because he's got all that it takes. Anything else pales into insignificance. Any other quality of life becomes shabby, empty and dilute, anemic.

That's why most Christians are bored. Quite frankly, and I'm not letting any secrets out, that's why lots of Bible school students in our own Bible schools are bored. Especially when they first arrive because they've never come to understand the nature of the Christian life.

They come tooted with the idea that it's a religion called Christianity. Never come to grips with the fact that the only purpose which the Lord Jesus died, shed his precious blood, was that he, as our incarnate savior risen from the dead, might come, reinvade our humanity, clothe himself with us so that we might be to him now as men what he as man was to his father as God. That makes life exciting.

That makes life miraculous. But the chances are, if you are told by the Lord Jesus whom you've received as your redeemer and enthroned as king within your heart, if you're told by him what to do and do as you're told, the chances are he's gonna behave, without whom you and I can do nothing. That means God's gonna behave.

In other words, your life is gonna become a miracle. Nothing sensational, nothing spectacular, just miraculous. Because there'll be only one possible explanation for what happens.

Jesus, as God, allowed to be God. So you become one of God's friends by being told what to do and doing as you're told. You meet God's friends when you're told what to do and do as you're told, because you'll meet somebody who's being told what to do and is doing as told.

That makes life exciting. Do you often meet God's friends? Quite frankly, as a Christian, is your life an exciting thing? Things always happening for which there's no possible explanation? But God, that's normality. If you don't know that, all you've got is Christianity as a religion, but you haven't come to know Christ as a person.

All you know is that he did his thing 2,000 years ago so that you'd get redeemed. You could wipe your dirty feet on him like a doormat and get into heaven instead of hell. That isn't Christianity.

Christianity is Christ. Clothed with your redeemed humanity 24 hours a day so that every new day that dawns is as big as God. Well, all the prospects of seeing him at work in three, whether you know it or whether you don't, that's the exciting part about it.

Anybody can get excited about what they see happening, but the true Christian gets excited about what he knows is happening, whether he sees it or not. That's terrific. And every now and again, God takes a little, unless you look inside and say, see what happened.

Man, I'd never believe it. And God said, I know, that's why I didn't tell you. Turn to Mark chapter 11.

11th chapter, Mark's gospel. And verse one, when there came nigh to Jerusalem unto Bethphage, that's the Lord Jesus and some of his disciples at the Mount of Olives. The Lord Jesus sendeth forth two of his disciples and he said to them exactly what he said to Elijah so many centuries before, go, go.

Go your way into the village over against you. As soon as you be entered into it, you'll find a colt, a donkey tied, whereon never man sat. He's untamed, untrained, unbroken.

Loose him and bring him. Did you get his instructions? He said to these two disciples, I want you to go into the village, there you'll see a donkey tied and I want you to untie that donkey and bring him to me. And he knew what they were thinking.

And they were thinking probably what you would have thought had you been there and they. You can't do that. You can't just go into the village and undo a donkey and bring it.

I mean, it says now donkey. I mean, you just can't do things like that. I mean, somebody who owns the donkey will come out in a rage, he'll be mad.

We'll end in jail. So said the Lord Jesus, if any men say unto you, why do you do this? Say that the Lord hath needed him. Well, that didn't sound too convincing.

I mean, if I needed transportation, I might say to you, do you mind popping downtown and see if, if you see a Cadillac, just jump in and drive it up and bring it to me. How would you feel? You'd say, we can't do that. You can't just jump into somebody else's car and drive it off.

That's the quickest way to jail. Or would be in most civilized countries. And then I say, well, don't be concerned about that.

If somebody comes out in a rage and mad because you're taking his Cadillac, just simply say, the Lord hath needed him. Do you think that'd be very convincing? Do you think that'd keep him out of jail? That was the proposition. Never be shocked at the propositions that the Lord Jesus presents to you, if you're one of his friends, part of his history.

Every else may be shocked if you were to tell people on the way what you were going to do. They say, you can't do that. You're sticking your neck out.

But they were his friends. Somewhat mystified, somewhat baffled, and somewhat skeptical. But we know they were his friends because look at verse four.

They went their way. They were told what to do and did as they were told. If any man say unto you, why do you do this? Say ye that the Lord hath need of him and straightway he will send him hither.

And they went because they were sent. And they found the donkey exactly tied by the door without in a place where two ways met. And they untied the donkey.

And immediately as they began to untie the donkey, certainly of them, verse five, who stood there said unto them, what are you doing? Untying that donkey. That donkey isn't yours. And they looked at each other meaningfully.

And said, here we go. See you in jail. Hope somebody comes and bails us out.

And then one of them remembered what the Lord Jesus said. As they said unto them, what are you doing? Taking that donkey. One of them sort of swallowed hard.

And he said, the Lord hath need of him. And as Jesus commanded them to their amazement, they let them go. Brought the donkey back to the Lord Jesus and said, you got friends down the village? The Lord Jesus said, yes, of course.

You didn't tell us you got friends down the village. Well, no, I don't have to tell you who my friends are or where they live. All I have to tell you is to do what I say and you obey, that's all.

I tell you what to do and you do as you're told. Then you'll meet my friends. I don't have to introduce them.

But I'll tell you something. If you haven't come to that place in your heart whereby whether you know it or not, understand it, can explain it or not, you're prepared to do as you're told. Unless you're prepared to come to that place in your heart where being told what to do, you do as you're told, you'll never meet my friends.

Because you won't be one of my friends. That's why I asked you whether you really are one of his friends. Look at chapter 14, verse 12, the first day of the unleavened bread.

When they killed the passerby, his disciples said to him, where will thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat this passer? We've let it right to the last moment. I mean, we've been somewhat negligent. I mean, we're not ready for passer.

So verse 13, the Lord Jesus sendeth forth two of his disciples and said unto them exactly what he said to Elijah. Go, go into the city. There shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water.

Follow him. Now that must have been a little unusual. I mean, if I were to say to somebody else, go downtown and when you see a man wearing a pair of shoes, follow him.

I mean, that would all be confusing because you'd probably see about 20 people wearing shoes. Which ones are you going to follow? It would only have any significance if it was very unusual for people to wear shoes. And of course, that's exactly what the Lord Jesus meant because it was very, very unusual to see a man carrying a pitcher of water on his head.

That was the woman's job. No man would do that. I mean, when a man went on a journey, he rode the donkey.

His wife came behind with the baggage on foot. They were the days. Before women's lib and all that stuff.

Yes. You see, only the women did that job. They carried a pitcher down to the well, filled it with water and balancing magnificent on their head, brought it back.

No man did that. But the Lord Jesus knew there was going to be a man with a pitcher on his head. You'll see a man bearing a pitcher of water, follow him.

And wheresoever he shall go in, say to the good man of the house, he's not the one who's important. He's simply going to take you to a certain house and then the owner of the house you'll meet. Say to him, where is the guest chamber where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples? And immediately the owner of the house, the good man, he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared.

They'll make ready for us. How do you know these two were Christ's friends? Verse 16. His disciples went.

They were sent and went. And when you're sent and went, you're put. And if it's God who sends you, it's God who puts you.

They came into the city, found as he had said, a man bearing a pitcher upon his head. He led them to the house. They put the question to the man.

He showed them the room all ready and they made ready for the Passover. And when they came back, they said, Master, you got friends in that city too? And the Lord Jesus said, yes, of course. I got friends everywhere.

But you won't meet them until by me you're told what to do and do as you're told until you're sent and went and put. You see, this is the secret of Christian ministry. It's being sent, not being called.

You're not called into Christian ministry, you're sent. You're called to the Lord Jesus. When the Lord Jesus says, come, which direction do you move? Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden.

Come unto me. Which direction do you move? In the direction of the Lord Jesus. Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.

Which direction do you move when you hear his call? To him. If any man thirst, John 7, 30, 70. If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink.

Whenever the Lord Jesus says, come, the direction you move is Christ. Then you're sent. Nobody is legitimately sent who hasn't first come.

To the only one who is head of the body has the right to give you your assignment. You're not called into the ministry. You're not called to the pulpit.

You're not called to the pastorate. If you are, then you missed it. Because it won't be Christ who called you.

It may be a pulpit committee. Or it may be just the looted pictures you saw in the missionary meeting. And somebody stands up and uses that spiritual blackmail and says, if you don't go, millions will perish.

That's nonsense. The Lord Jesus, if any man's sick, any man, he'll find. If any man asks, he will receive.

Let only a man knock, the door will open. Only those who fail to seek, fail to find. Only those who do not receive, who fail to ask, and to them alone does the door remain shut, who never knock.

But the Lord Jesus didn't say, if a man seeks, so long as I've got somebody around that'll do as I tell them, he'll find. If any man asks, so long as I've got somebody reliable, then he'll receive. But of course, if I haven't got anybody around who'll do as they're told, then I'm sorry.

Go hungry. If any man knock, well, said the Lord Jesus, the door will open so long as I've got somebody around who'll open the door. God doesn't qualify his activity in that way.

He doesn't hang his integrity upon the frail thread of human integrity. If you don't go, when you're sent, I tell you what, somebody else will. You'll be the loser.

And you will be held blood guilty, the Bible says, as though that person would have been lost because you didn't go. But please don't imagine that because of your infidelity, because of your idleness, because of your love for the world or your lust for ambition or money, you don't go where as a child of God you should be. Don't imagine, please, that anybody's gonna go to hell because of that.

Because you're not indispensable to sustain God's integrity. The Lord Jesus said, if man stops speaking, the stones will cry out in testimony as to who I am. Don't ever imagine that you're indispensable to God's saving purpose.

You'll impoverish yourself. You'll live in incredible misery. Poverty.

If you're other than available to the Lord Jesus, other than willing to be one of his friends, part of his history. But other folks aren't gonna suffer. The Lord Jesus will make sure of that because he always keeps his word.

You'll meet his friends when you are his friend by being told what to do and doing as you're told. Then life will become an incredible adventure. His disciples went forth, came into the city, and found as he had said unto them.

And they made ready the passer. Well, back to the first book of Kings, chapter 17. Don't be surprised at the kind of friends that God has who are told by him what to do and do as they're told.

It shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook, verse four of chapter 17, then first book of Kings, and I have commanded the ravens. To feed thee there. Who told the ravens to feed Elijah? God did.

They were his creatures. Not only were they his creatures, they were his friends. Because being told what to do, they did as they were told.

You'll find all kinds of strange people numbered amongst God's friends. Especially when you get to heaven. You'll be amazed at the people you see in heaven.

You'll be surprised. He is here? You mean she got in? I'll tell you something, if you're that surprised, nobody will be more surprised than they to see you there. So don't kid yourselves.

God commanded the ravens. They were told what to do and they did as they were told. He went and did according unto the word of the Lord and he met God's friends.

He went and dwelt by the brook Cherith that is before Jordan and the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning and they brought him bread and flesh in the evening. Why? God commanded them. And they had enough sense, which is more than most of us have got, to do as they were told.

Part of God's history. Part of the action. I hope you're prepared to be as smart as the ravens.

And he drank of the brook. But it came to pass in verse seven that after a while the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land, which wasn't really surprising. And it looked at first as though God's plan had gone astray.

He was told to go to the brook Cherith there, drink the water, now there was no water. But remember what may be a dilemma to you and to me is never a dilemma to God. It was just another opportunity for God to demonstrate that he's big enough for the job.

In the Chinese language, the word crisis is translated dangerous opportunity. That's good. Any crisis in your life is just a dangerous opportunity for God to demonstrate his adequacy and his overwhelming sufficiency in the supply that he's prepared to make available to anybody for he says, I will supply all your need according to my riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Came to pass after a while, the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. In verse eight, the word of the Lord came unto him saying, arise, go, get thee to Zarephath, Serypta as it's elsewhere translated, which belongeth to Zidon and dwell there. And behold, God said, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain me.

I commanded the ravens to feed you and they did. But now the water's dried up, so go to Zarephath and there's a widow woman, I've commanded her to sustain you. I wonder what you would conjure up in your mind if God told you that you were going to a certain city and a widowed lady there was gonna give you accommodation and take care of you.

A beautiful mansion, widow of an oil tycoon with roots in Texas. Liberate servants to show you to your suite. Is that what you have in mind? Well, Elijah, we're told verse 10, because he was God's friend, arose and went.

It's a fascinating study in the whole of the Bible to see what happens when a man or a woman or a child is told by God what to do and they do as they're told. They're the ones who carry the ball. They're the ones who know the excitement of knowing God for themselves.

They live miraculously. The knowledge of the living God isn't boring to them, it's only religion that's boring. To know God for yourself, that's exciting.

Trouble is we've reduced that incredible relationship that the Lord Jesus came to restore on the basis of a redemptive act and regenerative purpose that puts God back into the man, we've reduced it to a theological proposition, to a dull religious exercise instead of the hilarious excitement of sharing the life of God as the human vehicle of his divine activity. How can you miss it? He arose and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widowed woman was there.

He didn't know who she was. She was gathering of sticks to him. She was just a beggar woman.

So said he to her, fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called after her and said, by the way, I'm hungry, bring me something to eat too. Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

Verse 12, she said, as the Lord thy God liveth. I have not a cake. I've only got a handful of meal in a barrel.

I've got a little oil left in a cruise. And behold, I'm gathering two sticks that I may go make a fire, dress it for me and for my son, that we may eat it and die. That's all we've got left.

We've tried to eat things out, but now this is the moment of extremity. I'm gathering a couple of sticks to build a fire. I'm going to bake that last cake, explain to my little boy exactly the situation.

We're going to divide it between us and die. These are God's logistics. This is how God takes care of his friend.

Bunch of birds, a bankrupt, a dried up stream and a bankrupt widow. Sounds really exciting, doesn't it? Some of you think, well, that's the way I live. That's about all I know about God's logistics.

But it makes life exciting, doesn't it? When you come to that last extremity, when you feel that's it, and then God just moves in, magnificent. As of course he did for her, because she was one of God's friends. Elijah said to her in verse 13, well, don't be frightened, go and do as I said.

Make the fire, bake a cake. And then he said something that you might think was essentially shocking. Make you bristle.

He said, make me thereof a little cake first. Take the little that you've got that you were going to divide between yourself and your son and die and bring me first, me first. Does that sound good to you? You might feel in your heart a man dares to take a poor woman in the utmost extremity of her poverty and demand that of the little that she's got for herself and her son, knowing that when she's eaten that, that's the lot and she's gonna die of starvation and you come and say, me first.

You say, how could a man be so heartless, so sadistic? Why did he say me first? What he was really saying was God first. Your God and my God told me that he had commanded you to sustain me. Your first priority is to do as you're told.

Not look at your circumstance. Not wonder how afterwards you're gonna make ends meet. Uh-uh, that's not your business.

God told me that he commanded you to sustain me. So do as you're told. You don't have to.

No, you don't have to any more than you have to. You don't have to do as you're told by the Lord Jesus. You men and women here in Bible school, you're told again and again what God demands of you by virtue of his sovereignty within your heart as the redeemer whom you say you have accepted as your savior and are prepared now to allow him to live in you.

You don't have to do as you're told any more than she had to. Elijah could have said, you don't have to do as you're told. If you want to, light your fire, bake a cake, divide it between yourself and your son, eat it and die.

That's if you want to. But I'll tell you something. God having commanded you to sustain me if you'll put God first and bring me first, what God told you to bring, he'll take care of the consequences.

Never sympathize with anybody because God, of what God has told them to do. God doesn't deserve that kind of an insult. You don't really mean that God wants you to do that.

Well, yes. Oh, he can't mean that. Yes, he does.

Don't waste your pity on somebody who's prepared to be told what to do and do as they're told. Just pity yourself at how little you know about God. Bring me first and after make for thee and for thy son.

For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruise of oil fail until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. In other words, said he to her, in your last extremity, take God his word, do as you're told and you'll live miraculously. A quality of life that will allow of absolutely no explanation, but God and his divine intervention.

How do we know she was one of God's friends? Very simple. It says verse 14, verse 15, she went and did. According to the saying of Elijah, she and he and her house did eat many days.

The barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruise of oil fail. According to the word of the Lord. Which he spake by Elijah.

Elijah was simply the means whereby on his lips, God could make articulate what he had to say to this woman. And she took God serious. And that's why God took her seriously.

And she became one of God's friends. Part of God's history. That's why all these centuries later, we're reading the story.

So what do we learn first tonight in this first initial introductory session? That you become one of God's friends when you're told by him what to do and do as you're told and God behaves and you live miraculously. And you meet God's friends when you're told what to do and do as you're told, because you'll meet those who are being told what to do and doing as they're told and living miraculously. And life becomes the adventure that God always intended life to be.

For those who are prepared as the creature to be totally identified with the creator. Who are prepared to step out into the dawn of every new day and say, God, in the measure of my availability, I thank you that today is gonna be as big as you are. And everything possible to you.

In the measure of which you see it necessary for the implementation of your plan in my life will be possible to me, thanks. Having a clue how it's gonna work out, that's not my business. I'm not gonna try to explain it to myself or anybody else any more than Mary did when God said, you're gonna conceive in your womb and bear a son.

Even though only engaged to a man, the marriage had never been consummate. She simply said, God, you said it, you do it. And God did it.

And that's why when you wrote the date today, as many of you probably did, you put 1991. Anno Domini, AD, year of our Lord. As opposed to BC, before Christ.

You see, you didn't know about Mary when you were introduced to her. But what did you learn about God? Well, they can take a teenage girl and split history. BC, AD.

Because a little baby was born at Bethlehem. You may not have known much about David, that little kid down from the sheepfold. But you learn a whole bunch about God, that he's bigger than bears and bigger than lions and bigger than giants.

If he's only got a little boy with a perfect heart, he's prepared to let God do it. And God does it. So, so simple.

Nothing complicated about the Christian life. So long as once you settle to take the Lord Jesus as seriously as he as man took his father seriously. So long as you and I are prepared to let the Lord Jesus be to us as God, what he then as man allowed the Father as God to be to him.

Then you got it made. Every horizon beckons you, heavy with blessing, golden with prospect. You can't wait for what's going to happen next.

We learned from Elijah that if you're told what you don't do as you're told, even the birds will feed you. Anything else you need to know? Let's pray. Amen.

Thank you Lord Jesus that you were prepared to step out of eternity into time. Thank you that you were willing to empty yourself, humble yourself, make yourself of no reputation, make yourself all that you as God knew man to be apart from God, nothing. And live miraculously.

A quality of life that could only be explained in terms of the Father as God cloved with your sinless humanity because you were prepared unstintingly to be utterly available, expendable. And as man prepared to let the Father be God in the man. Thanks for your obedience, even under death, the death of the cross.

Thank you that you give to us right now incredible privilege in response, in faith to your invitation to be part of your history. Now but amongst your friends. Grant that none of us may leave this place before the end of this week, having settled for anything less than that quality of life that allows no possible explanation, but God.

Restored to where he belongs, Christ living in our hearts. Our only hope of being restored to function. Displaying the glory.

Prepare hearts for all that you want to teach us through your word this week. We know the one who authored the book is the one who teaches it. And if he doesn't know what he meant by what he said, nobody else does.

So our expectation is wholly in him because we know it to be his supreme delight to take the things that are Christ's and reveal them unto us. To lead us into all truth. The truth, Lord Jesus, that you said would set us free.

Thank you. In your own dear, peerless, and precious name. Amen.

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