

# Dr. John Oswalt, Kings, Session 15, Part 1

## 1 Kings 19-20, Part 1

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Today, we're looking at chapters 19 and 20, which I've titled God's Mercy.

Let's pray together as we begin.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you that, as the old ritual says, your property is always to have mercy. Thank you. Thank you that that's the kind of God you are, who as the Psalmist says, does not remember our sins and our iniquities, but casts them as far away as the East is from the West. Thank you.

Thank you that you're that kind of God. And we pray, Father, that you'll give us the grace to accept your mercy and to respond to it with faith and with trust and obedience. Help us, Lord, that in this mutual relationship that you're asking for, that we might live your life in this world.

Thank you for your word. Thank you for the opportunity that we have to study it. And we ask that your Holy Spirit will apply its truth to each of our lives. In your name, we pray.

One of the strange things that we see in this story is the almost total collapse of Elijah. He has had a tremendous, tremendous victory as reported in chapter 18.

And he has, as we saw at the end of the last session, run before. Ahab's chariot, some 20 miles to the summer capital of Jezreel. However, as we begin chapter 19, we see that Jezebel is not very impressed.

And she sends word to Elijah in some way or another that she is going to kill him. She puts it in the form of an oath. May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow, I don't make your life like one of those prophets that were killed at the foot of Mount Carmel.

We might expect that Elijah would say, God will protect me. I'm not worried about you, woman. But in fact, we read in verse 3 that he was afraid and ran for his life.

And he didn't just run to the next county. As we look at the map, we can see that Samaria is here. He ran all the way through Israel, through Judah to Beersheba before he stopped.

That's a long run. Running from Mount Carmel to Jezreel looks like walking in the park. And when he got there, he went on a day's journey into the wilderness, leaving his servant behind him.

He came to a broom bush, sat down under it, and prayed that he might die. Wow. What in the world is going on here anyway? I suggest to you that what's going on is a reaction.

All of us who have been involved in ministry can perhaps understand this a bit. He has been on a high, a tremendous high. And in fact, we humans are not meant to live on highs all the time.

And there was a reaction set in. And from that high, he crashed. In a sense, what happened was that Jezebel just accentuated this thing.

It's interesting. I can personally reflect on this sort of experience. One time in my life, I was traveling a good deal, speaking, teaching.

And when I was on the way home from the airport in Lexington, Kentucky, I could pretty well pick out the spot on Route 68 coming south toward Wilmore when, as I expressed it, all the air went out. And I realized, and not being aware of it, that I had been on an adrenaline high. And now we're back to life as it is.

I think that's what happened to Elijah. And it's what can happen to any of us. We're not meant to live on the highs.

Thank God for them. But we should not be surprised if after the high comes a balancing, and we experience a low.

I think it's very easy in those circumstances to get, may I say it, hard on ourselves. And say, oh my goodness, what's the matter with me? I was experiencing such a spiritual high, and now I'm in the dumps. My goodness.

I'd like to suggest that's the devil talking. This is life. And if we have been on a high, we are not to be surprised if a low follows as we are equalizing.

But in that situation, we see Elijah having fallen into the depths, into the dumps. And he says, as the New International Version has it, I have had enough, Lord. Take my life.

I'm no better than my ancestors. And he fell down, lay down under the tree, and fell asleep. Yes, yes, poor me.

We ought to have had a great national revival as a result of that experience on Mount Carmel. But it hasn't happened. Not only that, but they're trying to kill me.

So let me just die. Let's get it over with. Now, notice God's prescription.

An angel touched him and said, get up and eat. He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals and a jar of water. Go on with life.

Don't give up. Go on with life. He ate and drank and lay down again.

The angel of the Lord came back a second time, touched him, and said, get up and eat. For the journey is too much for you. He's exhausted.

He's physically depleted. He's spiritually depressed. Get something to eat.

So, for us, many times the prescription is simply to take up the reins of life, to do the ordinary things, to do the common things, and start looking ahead. Elijah had been looking back, back at a great victory, back at the threat to his life. Now the angel says, look ahead.

Get ready. There's a journey in front of you. Now, it's interesting to me that we do not know why he chose this particular journey.

Strengthened by that food, he traveled 40 days and 40 nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. I wonder if there was a sense in which Elijah was saying, I better go back to where this whole covenant thing started. Again, I don't want to push this too far.

But there's a sense in which that is part of the prescription. Go back. Think about where you started.

Think about the ways in which God has revealed himself in your life. Think about the ways in which you have been used. Think about the ways in which God wants to take you back in order to take you forward.

I don't know. I don't know whether God in some sense directed him to this or whether he made the decision himself. But this journey, and I don't have a map for that, but this journey is even longer than the previous one.

There's a sense in which he had to go way back. Long back past the circumstances in Israel at this time. Long back past Jezebel and what she was trying to accomplish in God's land.

There's a sense in which this also has a larger spiritual significance. As I have said to you, this section of the book of Kings is crucially important. Will Yahweh remain the God of Israel? Or will he be replaced by Baal? Where does that all begin? In a real sense, it begins with the covenant with Abraham.

But especially with the covenant with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. Are we going to live in that covenant? Are we going to live in those commitments that we made back there that established us as a people or not? So, there's this real sense in which we've seen a period from Sinai to Elijah. Is the covenant going to remain in effect? Or is it going to be nullified? So, he goes into a cave.

Once again, we're not told he slept, but we're told he spent the night there. Notice then the word of the Lord. We talked last time about the word of the Lord as Elijah received it and spoke it.

Here comes the word of the Lord again. And the question is a very interesting one. The literal Hebrew says, what do you hear? There are a number of possibilities that we could assign to this statement.

The NIV and most of the other modern translations say, what are you doing here, Elijah? That has a certain negative note, doesn't it? What are you doing here? I'm not so certain it's negative. I think it could be, what is there here for you, Elijah? What can you learn here? Now it could be, why have you come here? But there are a number of possibilities. And he repeats it twice.

And Elijah answers the question twice. And he answers it essentially the same way. Interestingly, he doesn't quite answer God's question, does he? He doesn't say, well, I'm here to renew the covenant.

I'm here to regain my perspective. No. He answers another question.

I've been very zealous for Yahweh, God of heaven's armies. Very specific. The Israelites have rejected your covenant.

They've torn down your altars. They've put your prophets to death. And I'm the only one left.

Oh, friends, beware of the poor me syndrome. How easily we get focused on ourselves. And our difficulties and our problems.

God says, go out and stand at the mouth of the cave. And once again, it's the word. Actually, it's the silence.

There is a great wind. That's not God. There's an earthquake.

That's not God. There's a fire. That's not God.

And afterward came. And the Hebrew is very interesting. It's literally the sound of nothing.

Total, total stillness. And we think of Psalm 46. Be still.

And find out that I'm God. No, I'm not any of those cataclysms. I'm not the fire that fell on Mount Carmel.

I'm not the thunderstorm that came through. I'm not Baal. Who are you? The word.

In that silence, a voice said to him. The difference between the two is interesting to me. In verse 9, it's the word of the Lord came to him.

In verse 13, a voice said to him. I wonder if, in fact, in this case, it was an audible voice. I don't know.

But again, it's the issue that God is not in this world. And he cannot be captured in anything of this world. The only way he relates to us is verbally.

He speaks. And once again, Elijah responds in the same way. And God says, go back the way you came.

Go to the desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael, king over Aram. Anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, king over Israel.

And anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat, from Abelmeholah, to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael. Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.

And then, interestingly, sort of a parenthesis. Yet I still have seven thousand in Israel, all who have not bowed their knees to Baal, whose mouths have not kissed him. Elijah, you're not alone.

So, God gives Elijah a new ministry. And it's interesting that commentators debate.

Elijah, in fact, only anointed Elisha. And it's Elisha who anointed Hazael and Jehu. So, did Elijah disobey? Some wonder about that. I think not. I said to you last time that the ministry of Elijah and Elisha is really one ministry. And I think that's what's going on here.

Yes, Elijah, you're going to anoint Hazel, but you're going to do it through your successor. That's kind of interesting to me. Am I willing to have my successor, in fact, fulfill my calling? There's a certain sense of self-denial there.

And so, I don't think that Elijah is disobedient. I think, in fact, he is obedient in anointing his successor, who will carry on this ministry and fulfill what his leader, in fact, called him to do. The picture of Elisha's anointing is interesting.

He's obviously a wealthy man. He's out in the field. There are 12 teams of oxen in front of him.

It's pretty clear he and his family are the owners here. And Elijah comes along and simply throws his cloak over Elisha's shoulders. And Elisha knows what has happened.

He says, let me kiss my parents goodbye, and I'll follow you. I'll walk after you. Oh, this great theme of walking that runs through the Bible.

God says to Abram, walk in my presence and be perfect. Be what you were made to be. Now again, come walk after me.

This is what Jesus said to those young men on the shore of Galilee. Walk after me. Walk in my footsteps.

Go where I go. Hear what I say. This is what discipleship means.

Elisha cut up the plow, killed the oxen, offered a sacrifice that fed the people and left. Jesus still says to you and me, come, walk after me. Whatever it costs to leave the past, whatever it costs to leave your possessions, come, walk after me.