

Am I Like Elijah?

Pastor Vijay

www.gracetabernaclehyd.org

Father we just want to thank You once again for this morning, we have come to the ministry of the Word, this morning O Lord we want to say with Samuel, speak Lord Your servants are hearing. Grant us attentive ears O Lord and even as the Word gets ministered O Lord, I pray Father for faith, faith to arise. For You said O Lord, nothing matters except faith expressing itself through Love and therefore, this morning I pray Lord for faith to arise, encourage us and exhort us to love and to do good works and prepare us through the ministry of the Word, sanctify us and set us apart for Your coming O Lord, to that end I pray that You would anoint, the ministry of the Word even I the hearing and its speaking. We thank You, we praise You, in Jesus' mighty name we pray. Amen

So, last Sunday we've been looking at Rapture or Capture? Rapture is one imminent even that is yet to happen, which will happen. Heaven and earth will pass away but not the Word of the Lord, not even one jot or one tittle from the Word of the Lord will pass away. So, rapture is imminent and we have different theories, if you've heard last Sunday carefully but one thing if you've listened to the message carefully, so many theories but one essential through it all; we have to be prepared no matter what. That is the lesson I learnt and I can only prepare myself as an individual even though we are a body of Christ (many parts, one body) but we are also individual Christians or believers in the Body of Christ. So, we can only prepare ourselves individually, you know why? It is very interesting, it says, one will be left, one will be taken off, two will be sleeping in the bed, one will be left, and one will be taken off. You know what scares me? The word 'one'. Individually, it's like the Lord is going to pick one from here, one from there and the Bible says, we will all have to stand before the judgment of Christ, how? As a corporate body? No. As individuals. That would be interesting, isn't it?

You know the scariest exam in any university is a viva. What is it? Viva. If you have given your viva exam, you'll know. Everybody's heart is in his mouth because, in the exam you can write stories and somehow you can, you think that the volume of the words that you have written will somehow get you through the exam but once the viva exam is happening, you know what will happen? Doodh ka doodh, paani ka paani (truth will be revealed). We had a professor called Professor Yegnanarayana in our university, he was from the speech lab from IIT Chennai. He used to teach a course and he used to suddenly decide what kind of an exam he has to give. So, we are all prepared for this final exam and just before the last class was getting over, he said, "This exam is going to be a viva. Each of you will individually appear before me and I will test you personally to see how much of the subject you learnt." The senior most professor in the university is going to ask you questions, your heart will be in your mouth. Now, think about it, a senior most professor's interview is going to scare the daylights out of us, what will happen if we appear before the judgment seat of Christ? The closest of His disciples who was literally leaning on His bosom when He saw Jesus in all His glory, fell at His feet like a dead man. That is something which is imminent, it is definitely going to happen and we will all have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and therefore Paul says in *2 Corinthians 5*, he says, knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, what do we do? We persuade men.

2 Corinthians 5:11

¹¹Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

So, we could be either rapture ready or capture ready but we can only prepare ourselves as believers. Alright? So, let us look at *Luke 21:36* which was one of the verses we were looking at the last Sunday.

Luke 21:36

³⁶Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things and stand before the Son of Man without being ashamed. What is that? That you may be counted worthy. Another translation which is the NIV translation, very interesting. Look at what it says NIV and NLT

Luke 21:36

³⁶But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” ESV

But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength. If you want to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, you better have strength. Strength, counted worthy and have strength, otherwise you know what will happen? Your knees will start knocking, you remember Belteshazzar? His knees started knocking just because when he saw the writing on the wall, can you imagine that? You've been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Another translation, this is the new living translation NLT

Luke 21:36

³⁶Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man.” NLT

That is the reason why in one Telugu in one of the chapters in Job it says - people who are strong in the Lord will be raptured, that's essentially the translation. You have the strength, in other words, you have the strength not to be prevailed against by the enemy, the onslaught that is going to happen in these last days, the trial and the tribulation and the testing that is going to come upon all people. If it has not already started in your life, it will start. In the beginning of the year you might have said, 'Lord let there be a peaceful, trial free, test free year.' You will not grow. If you want to really know how much of spiritual strength you have, it is imperative that we be tested. It is the testing of the faith which is much more precious than gold it says, right? So, you should have the strength to be able to stand, to be not prevailed against but rather be overcomers, not be overcome but be overcomers in the last days. The things that are happening all around the world, even in our own country, horrible. There is unrest all around, from the top to the bottom, there is no place, there is no peace. It says in *2 Chronicles 16*, the Lord confused the people and He did not let peace in any of the nations in those days there was wars, rumors of wars and we are living in those times. Even in our own country, every part from east to west, north to south, there is unrest. So, do we have the spiritual strength, the caliber to be able to be overcomers, and not be overcome? That is something which we need to always ask ourselves this question. Right? Matthew 16, the Bible says, what is the key, what is the key to have the strength. Matthew 16 this is at Caesarea Philippi where Jesus is asking the disciples what is the testimony of the people about Him and this is what the disciples have to answer.

Matthew 16:13-18

¹³ When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” ¹⁴ So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Look at that, a powerful statement. He has a revelation and this is what Jesus has to say about that.

¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock. What is this rock? This rock of the revelation that I gave to you. I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not be able to overcome it because you have the strength now, because you know Me, you have a personal relationship with Me, you have an ongoing, vibrant worshipful, prayerful, relationship with the living God. That is the key for spiritual strength. And then if you have that kind of a relationship with God, you know what happens, you will not be overcome but you will rather be a person who will overcome and therefore you will have the strength one day to escape all these things and stand before the Son of

Man unashamed and therefore what do we need? We need revelation of the knowledge of God, not just knowledge, not head knowledge, we need a revelation. Revelation is always in a relationship which is based upon a covenant, it is not a contract, it is a covenantal relationship that we have with the Lord and that is the basis of all Revelation and true knowledge. *Daniel 11:32* it says

Daniel 11:32

³² Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.

See the Bible always gives us patterns. Okay, I want to be a person who is going to be raptured. How many of you want to be raptured? People who want to be a part of the tribulation? Some people are not sure. See, let me tell you something, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. So, if I want to be raptured I should have the faith to be rapture, exactly, essentially. So, if I have to have the faith to be raptured, I should listen to the Word which will prepare me for rapture, that is the point. If you are going for a mathematics exam and you study for physics paper, you don't have the faith obviously, of course, unless you are Anurag who is a genius who is got everything in his mind, any exam he is ready. Alright. So, you have to have the faith and faith to be raptured only comes when you prepare by listening to the Word which prepares you for rapture, do you understand that? It's clear, it is not very difficult.

So, God, what does He do? As I said, we have to be prepares as individuals because all of us have to personally stand before the judgment seat of Christ and it is one from here, one from there who will be lifted up, therefore you should circle on the word 'one', that's a scary word and everybody will be raptured from different places. Now, how do we prepare ourselves? Does God show us paradigms or patterns of symbols in the Old Covenant which prepares us for rapture? Of course and as I said, He shows us two individuals from the Old Covenant who were raptured and in the mouth of two witnesses everything gets established. So, the fact that it is there is going to definitely be an imminent rapture is shown to us or given to us in the Old Covenant by two witnesses who were raptured and did not taste death. They did not taste death.

You know what the word rapture means? Rapture is a very interesting word. You went to a musical concert, you know what you say? We were all raptured meaning, the music took us and translated us into a different domain. That's what it means. So, in order to be raptured, you should be raptured about who? About Jesus. That's what translation means, you are totally gung-ho. You remember that song: In the Cross, in the Cross be my glory ever, till my raptured soul shall find, rest beyond the river. See, rapture. So, you have paradigms in the Old Covenant of course we know one obvious paradigm is Enoch and the other paradigm of course is, anybody else knows? Elijah. You are Bible scholars, of course you are in GTC, so you should be Bible scholars by this time. So, I'm going to show you about Elijah, one verse about Elijah, let's read from *James 5:16* onwards.

James 5:16-17

¹⁶ Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. And then who is this righteous man? A paradigm is given. We are only righteous by faith in Jesus Christ. That is the only righteousness that is qualified in the New Covenant. Who is a qualified righteous man? A righteous man who has put his trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross and that alone qualifies you as a righteous man. So, Elijah was a man, this righteous man, what does it say, subject to like passions as we are. Okay. And he prayed earnestly and it rained etc. By the way the word 'like-passions' occurs only two times in the entire New Covenant if I'm right including the Greek translation of the Old Covenant, only two time. A man of like-passions, the word is from which we get the word, homeopathy. It's a Greek word, homeo patheos, means people who are subject to like passions. Another place where it is mentioned. Paul and Barnabas are in Lystra, remember and they heal a man, Paul is preaching and they see this man has got faith to be healed. Paul says in the name of Jesus rise up and walk. So, he rises up and walk and everybody is so excited and they say, "The gods have come." Who has come? So they want to sacrifice to these gods now. So, they called Paul, Mercurius (Zeus) and Barnabas, Jupiter (Hermes), so they give them

names and they want to bring bullocks and everything and to sacrifice to these people. This is what we call as sycophancy, one day they will say, 'You are great,' and the next day they will say, 'Crucify You.' "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna," and the next day, "Crucify, crucify, crucify." Look at how Paul responds to this kind of reception.

Acts 14:15

¹⁵And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? You know what they did? They tore their clothes and they said, sirs why do you do these things, we also are men of like passions, just like you, we are not any different. So, Elijah was a man just like us. Everybody say. When you read the Bible do you believe that? So, let us read *James 5:17* in different translations so that we will confess it. This is the Word of God so you can confess. Everybody

Elijah was human being even as we are, he prayed earnestly . . . (NIV)

Elijah was human as we are and yet when he prayed earnestly . . . (NLT)

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours and he prayed fervently . . . (ESV)

I like the word fervently that's the reason why I use the word

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours and he prayed earnestly . . . (NKJV)

So, what does the Bible say, Elijah was a man just like, I want to personalize it now. Now, let's see that. 'Elijah was a man just like me'; everybody say that! Oh, fantastic! So, the question therefore is, if Elijah was a man just like me, what should be the next corollary question. What should be the corollary to this question? What should be the obvious question that I have to have? That is the title of today's teaching by the way. All that introduction is for today's teaching. The question I want to ask. If Elijah is a man just like me, the question is – 'Am I therefore just like Elijah?' Now, think about it, think for a few seconds can you put your hands on your heart and say, 'Elijah is a man just like me and I am a man just like Elijah.' Does anyone have the gumption to say that, seriously?

See, if Elijah was a man just like us and he was raptured, he was a type or prototype who was raptured, can we ask this counter question of if you want to call it convex question that, am I a man just like Elijah? That is the question, I want to answer this question because if I want to be prepared for rapture, I want to see a pattern in the Bible, I want to see, this is the pattern that God is showing me and says, 'If you are like him and God is not a respecter of persons, you will be caught up and you will not be a part of the second resurrection, we will be a part of the first resurrection on which the second death has no power.' So, how, I mean I was thinking about this question and this was way back at least I think it was in two thousand and twenty-one I was listening to a man of God, Telugu preacher. His entire refrain was - am I like Elijah, am I like Elijah, am I like Elijah and that was ringing in my head, almost for the past two years and then when Pastor was talking about rapture last Sunday and I was thinking about only two people in the entire Old Covenant who were the paradigms of the rapture and the Bible says, Elijah was a man just like ours but do we have the audacity and the faith to say, 'I'm a man like Elijah'?

So, what does it take for us to become a people, or a company who is just like Elijah? That is the question I want to answer this morning. There are several things that we can look at but I want to highlight seven. First Sunday of the fifth month, seventh day of the fifth month. So, you should be ready for some very interesting observations and I want you to think about this even as we read the word, study the word. Let us see, do we fall in this pattern. 1 Kings 17, let's read the introduction.

1 Kings 17:1

And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead. That is the introduction, by the way. We do not know, we do not have any other background, unlike any other prophet in the Old Covenant, we do not have any other background, we do not have the pedigree of Elijah; which tribe he belongs to we don't know. The genealogy of Elijah is not known, all we know

is, he's a Tishbite from the inhabitants of Gilead. By the way Tishbite means captivity, the one who's been captivated, the one who's been raptured and captivated by God, that's what it means and Gilead means a witness. The witness of a person who is been captivated by God and the word Elijah means Yahweh is my God. That's what it means. Eli-yah, Eli means my God, Yah is Yahweh. So, this morning we first will look at the man. Irwin Wallace wrote a book called, 'The man.' My dad's favorite book which he always used to speak about when we were growing up. The man, who is this man? Elijah, the Tishbite. What is this introduction? A man who is captivated by God. What does it mean? Who is being taken prisoner by God, how? Voluntarily. *Ephesians 4:1* look at what it says,

Ephesians 4:1

¹I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

As a prisoner of the Lord. Did you see that? As a prisoner of the Lord, then I urge you to live a life, worthy of the calling that you have received. We should be counted worthy to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, right? Rapture, escape all these things and be counted worthy. So, what should you do? We should also become prisoners of the Lord. A prisoner. Who is a prisoner? One who is being captivated by God, how? Voluntarily. He says, 'Lord, my life is not mine anymore because the price that You paid for my soul'; it's like a bondservant. The bondservant has been freed, now he's released after he has served seven years and you know what the Bible says, he says, 'You know what master, I don't want to leave you, I want to be a servant for life.' So, what does he do? He takes his ear, takes him to the door and he pierces that awl through the ear and you know what happens? That person becomes his servant for life voluntarily. That is why everything in the Kingdom of God is voluntary. It cannot be forced the question therefore, this morning, Elijah is just like me, but if I have to be like Elijah, what should I be? I should be a, what? A prisoner of the Lord, a volunteer of God. I have given myself voluntarily without any reservations, completely to God. See, we are either captives of God or captives of the devil. We are captives of the world or captives of God, we are captives of sin or captives of righteousness but captives we are, whether we like it or not we are captives. So, *2 Timothy 2* will say this, very powerful verses. *2 Timothy 2:24* onwards

2 Timothy 2:24-26

²⁴And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, ²⁵in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, ²⁶and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all able to teach and patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition if God perhaps will grant them repentance. So, one of the things that you need to understand. You cannot just manufacture repentance, God has to grant us repentance. So, there is a time frame for repentance after that the door is closed and even if you seek for repentance, you will not find it like Esau, so understand that. So, let's move on. *2 Timothy 2* So, that they may know the truth and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, how? Having been taken captive by him to do his will. I told you right, either you are captives of God or captives of the devil, you are captives of the world or captives of God, you are captives of sin or you are captives of righteousness, it is your choice. You don't have to be, sin will not have dominion over us, you know why? Because we are no longer under law but under grace. It is our choice, so it is voluntary. Remember the last words to Peter? *John 21* this is what it says,

John 21:18-19

¹⁸Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." ¹⁹This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

Most assuredly I say to you Peter, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked wherever you wished but when you are old, what happens, you will stretch your hands and another will gird you and carry you where you will not go. I remember my younger days when I was baptized. After I got baptized, we were all full fired up. 2002 we got baptized and then we went our own way, after that we just chose our own paths and went our own way and God in His sovereignty had to literally change the course of our lives to bring us back to His plan. So, when we were younger what do we do? We go our own way, we have all our plans but I hope and pray that we will give our hands to Jesus like Peter did and this, He spoke signifying by what death he would glorify God and when He had spoken this, He said to him, follow

me. That's all. This is death, death to himself, he's not going to do any of his own will any more. He's going to only do what? The will of God.

Remember Paul's persecution of the Church? He was persecuting the Church, he was creating havoc, people were getting scared of him. Sometimes I feel that people in the Church would have prayed, Lord this man is creating havoc Lord, take him out, take him out Lord. I mean some of us pray such prayers, right? Lord, just take him out of the way Lord, do something Lord. One man would have prayed Lord, this guy Lord, is creating havoc persecuting, we have not done any harm to them, he is coming after our lives, now he is getting these letters and wants to go to churches in Damascus and also persecute them. Lord, do something, take this man out of the way. Ask the person this question, did God answer that prayer? Did God take him out? Yes, God took him out. He killed Saul and who came out Paul. And therefore, he says, I am what? Crucified with Christ. That prayer was answered by the way in a strange way. He was doing whatever he wanted to do and once he was confronted by the Lord, you know what he did? Lord, what do you want me to do? He became a servant of the Lord, he became a prisoner of God, a fool for Christ.

Romans 6:17

¹⁷But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸ And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. Once you were a captive of sin, now you are a captive of God. This is what I wrote even as I was preparing this teaching, I wrote this thought, you can just think through with me. If I am not a captive of God, I will not be an instrument of God to release those who have been captivated by the devil. It is impossible unless I am a captive of God I cannot be a person who will be an instrument by God, who will release others. They will say otherwise, physician, heal yourself first.

Genesis 14:14

¹⁴Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

Now, when Abraham heard that his brother was taken captive. The man was enraptured by God, you see what, he surrendered himself. He armed three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house and went in pursuit as far as Dan. So, who is Elijah? The first thing the man, the man who was absolutely captivated by God. He understands, 'Lord, I am Your prisoner. I do not have any rights over my life, You take control.' Question, Elijah was a man just like us and if I have to be a man just like Elijah, what should the first step be? 'Lord I take my rights away from my life.'

You know one of the things after you come into the ministry you will learn. Most of the times you will say, 'Lord, I did not sign up for this, but it is too late now. It's over. I have put the hand on the plow, I am not turning back. I am Your prisoner Lord, I'm a stranger and a pilgrim, I'm a prisoner of the Lord, I am here to do Your will.' That is the first thing about Elijah. Therefore, this morning, the first step to the best of your ability, say, 'Lord, I surrender,' in your heart. You don't have to say it out loud, 'Lord to the best of my ability, I surrender. Areas of my life, I surrender, my family I surrender, my family I surrender, my anxious thoughts I surrender, my anxieties I surrender, my children I surrender, my husband I surrender, my life I surrender.' That is the man. Look at his testimony, the second thing I want to talk about is his testimony. The man and his testimony. Let's read the next part.

His Testimony

1 Kings 17:1

¹And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead said to Ahab. Look at what it says, as the Lord. By the way the word, 'as' is in italics meaning, it's not there in the original translation. So, let us read it without 'as', and it's actually very powerful. Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead said to Ahab, the Lord of Israel lives and I stand before Him. Does your

God live? If your God is alive, who takes your decisions? If your God is alive, who takes the decisions for you, your God or you? I'll tell you my dear brothers and sisters, you know I have seen many parents who do not want to send their children to other schools because they teach yoga in those other schools but actually they are practicing yogis themselves. What did I say? Everybody is like looking strangely at me. We don't want to send our children to secular schools because they teach yoga but what are you? Yogi. I will tell you what a yogi is. What does yogis do? They do yoga and what do you have in yoga? You have asanas. In their work place because they are working for money, they have what they call as padmasana – concentration, full concentration. I'm not going to be disturbed even on Sunday they are working because they have to make money. What are you? Yogi doing padmashana. So, when they come home, I'm talking about husbands basically, fathers especially, because they are the heads of the home. What are they doing in the home? They are supposed to be the spiritual head of the home but in the home, they do sirshasana. What is sirshasana? Head down, legs up. 'Please don't disturb me, please don't disturb me.' What do we do about these children? You take the decision. Which church do we go? You take the decision. What do we do with the money? You take the decision. You know why? I want to do sirshasana because when I do sirshasana, all my blood vessels will come to my brain, I want to improve my concentration, so that I can do padmasana, more money. What are you? Yogi.

So, when they come to church, there is another asana they do. That is called nidhra-asana. What is nidra-asana? Sleeping. So, padmasana, concentration before the screen and the computer because they have to earn money. Sirshasana, they are head down legs up in the home, they are not taking any spiritual decisions and "Pastor, when I come to your church Pastor, it says, I give My beloved rest. And your teaching and your preaching gives me a lot of peace and calm, I could not sleep in my home, I'm able to sleep in the church." What are you? A total fraud of the first order and you say I do not want to send my children to the secular school because they teach them yoga but you are yogi of the first order and then these yogis they have a group, yogi WhatsApp group and in Telugu they say, when yogi and yogi come together ash only will come after that, what are you? Yogi. Oh, we do not want any saffronization of India. Baba, you are a first class saffron in your own home. What are you talking about? Yogi. It is interesting, when I come to your church Pastor, I feel the peace. Revelation 1 is your God alive? Is your God alive, my dear brothers and sisters this morning? The Lord God of Israel lives, He's not dead. If He is alive, who is taking your decisions? If He is alive, how are you living? How are you dealing with your sin? Revelation 1 look at what it says in Revelation 1.

Revelation 1:17-18

¹⁷ And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. This is John in the island of Patmos. He has a revelation of Jesus Christ. But He laid His hand upon me, saying to me, do not be afraid, I am the first, I am the last, I am He who lives and was dead and behold, I am alive forever. Amen and I have the keys of death of hades. So, if I am alive for ever more, what do I do? When I sin, what do I do? When I fall into temptation, what do I do? What do I do, if my God lives, what do I do? What do I do when I fall into temptation? Do I just lose hope, no, no, no my dear brothers and sisters because the Bible says in Hebrews 10, look at what it says in *Hebrews 10:19*

Hebrews 10:19-20

¹⁹ Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, that He shed upon the Cross, by a new and living way. What is He going to do? He is going to purge our conscience from dead works. If we confess our sins, our God is not dead; He is faithful to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Do you believe the blood of Jesus speaks for you this morning? I believe it with all of my heart. Why are you walking with condemnation therefore? Why is there no joy in your heart? Why should Abel say, 'Let there be joy in the house of the Lord,' and 'Say Halleluiah my dear brothers'? It should come naturally, isn't it? That's what I told you, right? We put padmasana before the computer. When we are in the movie theatre, we are in raptures, they take us into a different realm and when come to church we start sleeping. Sleep postures. He sprinkles because our God is not dead. We remember the song in Sunday school, God's not dead, He is alive. Remember that song? I don't agree with the other part of the song; I feel Him in my

hands, I feel Him in my feet etc. but the first confession is powerful. God's not dead, He is alive. If He is alive, who is making your decisions? If He is alive, why do you still walk in condemnation? Jesus died, Jesus rose from the dead and He justified us in Christ and before the judgment seat of Christ, how does God look at us, just as if we have never sinned; clothed in the righteousness of Jesus because of the death, burial and the resurrection. He is not dead, He is alive. The Lord God of Israel lives my dear brothers. Second thing, the Lord God of Israel lives, therefore, what happens? *Hebrews 7,*

Hebrews 7:23-25

²³Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. ²⁴But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

And there were many priests because they were prevented by death from continuing but He because he continues forever has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore, He is also able to save you, how? To the uttermost. Why? Because He always lives to make intercession for us. What is He doing right now? What do the Cherubs sing? Cherubs are singing, 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God almighty, forever and forever and forever He lives.' When the Cherubim are singing, do you think God is quiet? Yes the Cherubim have to say, 'Holy, holy, holy,' God is never quiet, Jesus is never quiet, He always commends His people – "Great is your faith," "I have never seen a faith like this in Israel." "Let it be done according to your faith." He always responds to worship. The Cherubim are crying out, 'Holy, holy, holy,' you know what Jesus Christ is saying? "Mercy, mercy, mercy, Lord for these children who are falling because I have taken their place on the Cross; mercy, mercy."

"Woe is me, I am undone," said Isaiah, when he saw the holiness of God. "I am a man of unclean lips," and what does the Cherubim do? The moment he confesses his sin, immediately the tongs from the altar come. What are those? The intercessory prayers of Jesus Christ crying out for mercy for His children. They come and purge, oh, the Cherubim say 'Holy, holy, holy,' and Jesus says what, "Mercy, mercy, mercy," because the Blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. The blood of Abel cries out for revenge. The Blood of Jesus cries for Mercy. Therefore, 1 John 2 will say.

1 John 2:1-2

¹My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

My little children these things I write to you, so that you may not sin and if any one sins, we have an who? Advocate. If Jesus Christ is your Advocate, who is that prosecution lawyer. Remember Zechariah, the Gospel according to Zechariah 3? Joshua standing with his dirty clothes, filthy garments and the angel of the Lord standing there and Satan is standing at his right-hand bringing accusations and what does the angel of the Lord say, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan." You know why, because my God is not dead, He is alive. He is making intercession for us, He is my advocate on the side, on the right-hand side of Jesus Christ, there is an advocate. That is the reason why in the throne room, in Revelation 5, you have the throne room of Heaven. Where you see this incredible revelation of God the Father on the throne and then Revelation 5 there was a scroll which was sealed, nobody could open the scroll and John started weeping. He said, "Lord who is there, worthy to open the scroll?" and suddenly, "Don't worry, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, right there next to the ancient of days, He is there, shed His Blood and He is able to open the scroll," and therefore, what does he says, "He has purchased all of us through His own Blood and made us into kings and priests unto God."

So, first thing, because we have a God who is living, He is forever making intercession for us, He is able to save us to the uttermost, second thing, when we fall, we have a new and a living way. Third thing, how do you know that your God is living?

Joshua 3:10

¹⁰And Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites:

Joshua said, Jesus said, by this you shall know, that who is among you? the living God is among you. Who is among you? How? Because He will without fail drive out from before you, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites and the Amorites. How do you know that the living God is among you, that your God is not dead but He is alive, what is He doing? He is constantly delivering you from every spirit of uncleanness, every Canaanite spirit, every Hittite spirit, every Girgashite spirit, every Perizzite spirit, every Amorite spirit, every Jebusite spirit. It is being taken out from your life, little, by little, by little. That is how I know that you are in a state of constant deliverance. What are you in a state of? Constant deliverance. That is the reason why you should come to the teaching of the Word. What does God do? He will replace the lie in your heart by writing His truth on the tables of your heart through the Spirit. How, how does He do it? Look at what it says in *Psalm 18* everybody look at this, very interesting powerful verse,

Psalm 18:44-45

⁴⁴As soon as they hear of me they obey me; the foreigners submit to me.⁴⁵ The foreigners fade away, and come frightened from their hideouts.

As soon as they hear of me, that is God. They will obey me. Who is that? Who are those people? The demon spirits. The foreigners inside of you, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Jebusites and the Amorites, all the -ites, they will submit to me. The foreigners fade away and come frightened from their hideouts. There are hideouts in your heart, suddenly it is like this. You got a symptom and you go to the doctor. Nowadays what do doctors do? Complete examination, top to bottom and what happens? All the hideouts come, every hideout comes out. Ahh, this fellow, this is there, this virus is there, that virus is there, everything will show up and you know where, where all the spirits hide comfortably? They hide in the church. I told you right. Some people are like that, I told you yogis. They are also fantastic pretenders, they will come to you. You know how they will come to you? They are living a compromised life, absolute compromised life but they will come and say, 'Pastor, you are holy Pastor, I am not so holy, so God is not going to use me Pastor. I'm too unholy for God.' What is that called? I call it Satanic humility. Because what is Satan? He is a counterfeit, he fakes humility as well. "Oh Pastor, you are holy," I know it. Many people have come to my office and they said, "Oh you are holy Pastor, we are not that holy, we are not worthy to be people like this, but we will work for our own money, we will make our money, you do the job for us. In fact, please you fast and pray for my deliverance." What is that? "You fast and pray for my deliverance." What are you? This is called Satanic humility, demonic faith. What is that? "Oh, I tremble at God, I'm trembling, I don't like to come close to God lest I be struck dead," what is that? Demonic faith. Because demons, what do they do? They tremble, never submit. What are these? They are spirits which are hiding, they don't realize it. Isn't it interesting, I'll come to that later on.

Let's look at another translation. There are hideouts in you and those hideouts are actually strongholds, they are like you know this web that has been made by the demons, it is a nest. It has to be uprooted. I remember when we were at our previous house, the birds of the air used to come to our air-condition. So, we had this air-condition, those fellows used to come, bring all their twigs, nicely make a nice nest and they have a family. So, my wife got really frustrated. She said, "Do something about that Vijay." So, I said, "Okay fine." Let us reduce the gap, we will fill the gap between the roof and the ac, the ac outlet. So, I had a cushion kind of a thing, I bought a cushion, a thick cushion and on top of that I put some wrapping paper and I stuck it up to the wall, so I reduced the gap between the ac vent and the roof. But pigeons, they die hard, so they came, they looked at this wrapping paper, started poking at the wrapping paper nicely. They poked the wrapping paper and they took it out in a few weeks. Now what do they have? A comfortable cushion. Who provided that? I provided it. Now, what is there? A comfortable cushion, a beautiful family they made and now instead of two birds before, we had four families in the same place.

Church office, I put my helmet onto my bike, one sparrow comes, I said, 'What a cute sparrow.' So, I put my helmet like that and I went inside, generally I stay for about ten hours in the office. Ten hours I finished my work in the office and I come out and the cute sparrow has made a lovely nest with all its fantastic twigs there, about to start a family in my helmet. You know something my dear brothers and sisters, in each one of you, there is a nest of the devil. Some of you have the nest of lust, some of you have a nest of anxieties and anxious thoughts which is eating your gall. It's made a nest. It is a hideout. And the symptoms are asymptomatic. You don't even know it is killing you slowly like diabetes. Slowly it is killing you and you don't even know, the symptoms are not there. It is there, slowly, some viruses are there in

the body, that are asymptomatic, they don't show up until the damage is done. You are about to die now. The hideouts, they hide in the churches my dear brothers and sisters. Look at what it says in another translation, in the NIV

Foreigners cover before me as soon as they hear of me, they obey me, they all lose heart, they come trembling from their strongholds.

There are strongholds of lust in many of us. There's a stronghold of gluttony in many of us. We are gluttonous consumers of food. I mean last Sunday, I had a sudden attack of BP and it just shot up like anything suddenly, never had that before and after examination is done, I was talking to Doctor Richard and Doctor Richard said, "Pastor Vijay from today onwards no coffee, no tea." I said okay. "You can take one cup of coffee," but the point is for me either it is zero or one, I cannot make one cup like that, it is not possible for me, so I decided to give it up. You wouldn't believe the withdrawals I was going through, through the week for coffee. I was a consumer of coffee of the first order. I made 'Tea-Time' rich in Kistamma enclave. Pastor use to say, "He will put a garland around your photo and he will worship you, now Laxmi." I was a consumer of coffee and I went to Jharkhand, we have another Pastor, he's another tumbler, he only believes in jugs and mugs, either it is beer mug or coffee mug and there I also got used to black coffee now. I consumed, I consumed and I consumed. My whole body is full of caffeine now. Suddenly I gave it up, I said, 'No, no more coffee.' You would not believe it. I was falling asleep, I was having headaches, I was having pulls from different sides, you know why? All those hideouts were coming out now. The addictions, some of us are gluttons, you do not have any control over the food consumed. What is that one constant refrain? 'Mama, I'm hungry.' You just ate! 'I'm hungry.'

See, strongholds and how do strongholds come out? Because a living God speaks what? The living Word, which has authority, which has unction and you know where all these things hide? In the Church, comfortably, until one fellow comes and shows and says, 'Baba.' Some of you are addicted to pornography left, right and center and you are absolutely pretending before God. You are addicted lock, stock and barrel. It is a demon of pornography now; it is constantly eating your soul, you cannot have a right relationship with the opposite gender anymore, because your eyes are full of adultery. And where are you? Hiding in the Church. But what are you? Practicing yogi. My dear brothers and sisters, let us not pretend and deceive ourselves. Let them come out of their hiding. All strangers, foreigners occupying the temple of the living God. Understand that. You know when demons enter? Let me give you an example; Abigail, she is almost a teenager. Let's say she is walking toward her school, some guy is watching her. I knew it, so what will I do? I will walk right next to her. Right? Why? Because I am protecting her from that attack. What am I doing? I put my arm around her and walk with her, together. I don't want these fellows to see you and let them know when they see my eyes and they see the stare that they have to go through me first to touch or even see my daughter. That has to be made clear. So what am I doing in this process? I am protecting her. Abigail might say, "What is this dad? Why are you always doubting me? Why is he always behind me? Strict daddy. No freedom." What am I doing? Protecting her. I'll give you an example; why do we discipline our children? I will tell you why we discipline our children because every child by default; his default state is we have been birthed in sin shaped in iniquity. So by default there are only two authorities there are two sources of power, one is the legitimate power which is the power of the Holy Spirit it only flows through you when you come under the authority and the leading of the Holy Spirit. There is other power, the power of witchcraft which flows through you, but there is illegitimate authority. Who is an illegitimate authority? Any authority which discredits legitimate authority is illegitimate authority. And what is flowing through that person is the power of witch craft.

I'll give you an example now. What does witchcraft do? They either manipulate or they intimidate in order to control. So what do children do? They fall flat on the floor and they foam and froth, some children. They scream and whine, 'I want my way.' Why are you on the floor foaming and frothing? 'because I want my way. I want that T-shirt. I want this I want that.' So what do the parents do? 'Okay, okay, okay, I can't tolerate this. Take this T-shirt. Do you know what has happened? You have opened the door, into your children's life for the demonic to enter. What does discipline do? You take the whip and spank the day-lights out of the child.

What are you actually doing? I am protecting you from the spirit which is trying to enter into you. It is a wall. You don't realize that. How do I know this? I was asking the Lord, 'How do I know this, Lord?' you remember the guy who is foaming and frothing? The disciples were not able to deliver him. They come to Jesus and Jesus asks this question – "When did this happen? When did this demon enter into him?" Do you know what he says? "From childhood." If you don't restrain your children, do you know what you are doing? You are opening doors for the demonic into their lives.

You do not understand the discipline, the safe guards that your parents are giving you. I thank God for our parents who were tough. They put hedges of protections around us. I remember, when I got my EMCET result I said, 'I want to study in Vizag.' My mother said, 'No going to Vizag. You are studying here. I know you.' Parents know you. She forgot but I remember, she said, 'No going anywhere, if you want to go out of Hyderabad get into IIT then I will send you.' Oh! So then its fine?' protection. Hedges of protection. Otherwise there are hide-outs, my dear brothers and sisters.

Do you know how difficult it is to restrain children nowadays? They come to school and they are all over the place. They cannot sit in one place. Their legs are always shivering and knees knocking, restlessly. They have prostrate problems at the age of 8. 'I want to go to bathroom' 'I want to go drink water' 'I am hungry'. You know, there are two kinds of stand when children come to school, one is center stand (leaning forward with your chin resting on your hand) and the other is side stand (leaning to the side with your chin resting on your hand on the side). So when they come to class they are center stand, when they sit down at their desk to work they are side stand. What are you getting? Nothing into your head. Nidraasana. Foreigners hiding in churches. Some of you are bitter, you know they are so angry; you are angry at everybody. You are angry even at the dog who has done you no harm. Like me, wherever I see dogs I get irritated. The reason why I love my new complex is because there are no dogs. And suddenly I saw a dog and I am the only person in the entire community who is taking a stick and chasing the dog out. Some people are like that, they are angry, bitter. At what, we do not know. Full of bitterness.

You remember Simon, the sorcerer? 'I will give you money, please give me this gift. So that when I lay hands on somebody they will also receive this gift.' You know what Peter said, 'Let your money perish with you. I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness.' Suddenly that fellow starts trembling, 'Oh! Please pray for me pastor.' How typical, my dear brothers. How typical! 'Pray for me brother.' That is what I call, demonic faith, satanic humility. So what does the teaching of the living Word of God do? It cuts through all these pretenses and comes to the root of the problem and shows you what exactly you are.

Mark 1:21-22

²¹ Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. ²² And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Why? How did they know that He had authority? ²³ Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, "Oh! Please let us alone." How did the unclean spirits come? Every week they were happily coming to church and putting that fellow to sleep. ²⁴ saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!"

And Jesus rebuked them. So this morning I want to speak, 'All those demonic strongholds I rebuke them; all those strongholds which are hiding in our hearts. Those sicknesses which you don't even know, let them come out, in the Name of Jesus. Let them come out and show themselves. Let the strangers not hide; let them come out of their hide-outs.' And even as the ministry of the Word of God comes renounce them in the Name of Jesus. Send them out, send them back to where they belong. Understand this. Is your God living? Or is he dead? If He is living He is driving out, He is bringing them out of their hiding places and driving them out.

I realized, even as I teach and minister, how many things I am personally being delivered from. Don't be a passive hearer of the Word of God, my dear brothers and sisters. Be active.

1 Kings 17:1

¹And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

We are still looking at His testimony. Man first, and then his testimony, 'I Stand before God.' The question therefore is, Psalm 25, who can stand?

Psalm 24:3-4

³Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? ⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.

We have several idols. One of the biggest idols we all have is sarasvathi. Goddess of education. And the other is Laxmidevi. Goddess of money. So what are you? Sarasvathi puthraha. Or lamxi puthraha. That is one big idol. Everything in our life is centered around that – what will happen to my children? What will happen to my children? I will tell you, nothing will happen. If you do not put God as top priority in your life, everything will happen. Somebody called me up and said, ‘My son wants to go to Akash (an academy) their fee will be akash, I’m not sure if their rank will be akash. And he also wants to come to your church.’ Also? That is the reason why, if Baal is god worship him, if Jehovah is God worship Him. How long will you alter between two opinions? Some people have a person as their idol in their life. One fellow, he will bow down to that idol every day. Who is that fellow? One fellow who is in a relationship. He is an idol – what will he think? What will she think? What will my parents think?

Like pastor was saying, so many of us still live for the opinions of men. We are still captives of the opinions of men, they are the idols in our hearts, my dear brothers. And we have another idol – family background. What is that? Family background is a big idol. What is your caste? Caste; it has cast itself spell on many believers, unfortunately. I like the shock that they had at the marriage registrar office where the couples sign for their marriage. ‘Srikanth Ramachendra and Swapna Reddy’ and it is a Christian marriage. He was looking at the certificate and staring at me, ‘Huh? Srikanth Ramachendra and Swapna Reddy? What is this? Love marriage?’ Srikanth gets very upset when someone asks him if it is a love marriage, he will say, ‘No, No, no, arranged marriage. This was arranged by my pastor.’ That man was shocked, ‘things like this also happen?’ It is not one beautiful chowdhury girl, looking for a fantastic chowdhury man with a 5 figure salary. 5 figures must be dollars, not rupees. Whom are you worshipping? Laxmidevi. Money.

What will your money buy? Think about it my dear brothers, the more I am growing in the Lord, the more I see the futility of depending upon money. And the deception of depending upon money. It is therefore called the deceitfulness of riches. What do they do? They choke the Word. So what do you have? You have a divided heart. You don’t have a pure heart; you have a divided heart. What is the opposite of a pure heart? It is the divided heart. It is not an impure heart. It is a divided heart. You are not loyal; completely sold out to God. Now think about it, in any church how many people can the pastor count upon and say, ‘This person, I can depend upon him lock stock and barrel.’ Think about that.

For some people coming to church itself they expect a Nobel prize. Very few people.

James 4:8-10

⁸Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Elijah was a man just like us. Am I just like Elijah? And we have these romantic ideas about raptured one day. What are we doing? We are just fooling ourselves, my dear brothers and sisters. Let there be an honest appraisal about ourselves. It is called the self-appraisal form. Jacinth knows it very well, the manager. How do you rate yourself? Honestly if you rate yourself, on the count of 1-10 or 0-10 how will you rate yourself? As sold out to God? Elijah was a man just like us.

So the man, the testimony and the third thing – the surrender.

The Surrendered Vessel

How do you know that he is surrendered?

1 Kings 17:2-3

²Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ³“Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.

The Word of the Lord came to him. Oh, he was not searching for the Word of the Lord. Let me tell you something, I read a book by Derek Prince called, ‘Shaping the World Through Fasting and Prayer.’ Preface to that book was written by a man called Lou Engle. And he makes a very interesting statement, he says –

‘Fasting is like preparing a runway for the revelations of God to land.’

See, everybody is preparing a runway, whether you like it or not. Some of us are preparing the runway for the demons to land. Some of us are preparing the runway for the revelations of God to land. For example, any bad news that is there, who gets it first? Or any interesting news? 'You know what this person did? You know what happened to that person? How is it that you are the first person to know about it? You don't have to search for gossip, you prepared a runway and the demon of gossip is hovering over it, 'Oh the runway prepared for me' it will happily come and land on you. The Bible says, the Word of the Lord landed on Elijah. Why?

A type of that in the New Testament,

Luke 3:1-2

¹Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

The Word of the Lord circumvented all these big-timers and came to John in the wilderness. It came to John in the wilderness, do you know why? It is because there was one prepare runway for the Word of the Lord to come and land on that person.

Luke 1:80

⁸⁰So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

What has happened? He was preparing himself. How was he being prepared?

Mark 1:6

⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

Camel's hair meaning his apparel; 'apparel proclaimeth a man' – Francis Bacon. What does the belt around his waist represent? He is a man under control on his appetites. So where does the Word of God come? It comes to you. So this morning also, I am a man just like Elijah, if I am a man just like Elijah what should happen to me? The Word of the Lord should come to me as well. So how am I preparing myself to receive the Word? Think about it, how do we come to church? Prepared? Do you prepare early in the morning on Sunday? Do you start your preparation from Saturday evening itself? Or do you watch a good movie on Saturday, stay awake till 3 in the morning? And you come to church and expect to hear from the Lord and the Lord to hear you? Not possible.

2 Kings 1:7-8

⁷Then he said to them, "What kind of man was it who came up to meet you and told you these words?"

⁸So they answered him, "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

You know why he was recognized? He was a man who was prepared and who had control over his senses so that the Word of God can come and land upon him. This morning God is looking for runways. You know the scariest part of flying is not take-off, it is landing. You are never sure right? Sometimes it is smooth, sometimes it shakes. But if there is a runway, it doesn't matter what the weather is, what you are going through, what the circumstances are, if there is a prepared runway the Word of the Lord will come and find you. So if you are a man just like Elijah, what should happen? The Word of the Lord should come to you; a prepared vessel for the Word of the Lord to come.

So we looked at

- The man
- The witness
- The vessel

The fourth one is the pruning of the man, from all prejudice. The pruning from all prejudices. All of us have prejudices. We like people just like us, or in the same domain like us, or having the same problems like us. Am I right? So what does God do? He put us in a place where people are completely different from you.

See, when we are engineers, most of the time we are with engineers and we have the same focus. So we have a comminatory that is going on – you are engineer, I am an engineer, it doesn't matter what your back ground is, we are in the same boat, 'Hi five!' when you come to church we have people from different backgrounds, different languages, different habits, different attitudes, different temperaments, different likes and different problems, different baggage. And what are you supposed to do?

1 Kings 17:2-4

² Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ³ "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, (Cherith means pruning or cutting) which flows into the Jordan. ⁴ And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."

John 15:1-2

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

Leviticus 11:13-15,35

¹³ 'And these you shall regard as an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, ¹⁴ the kite, and the falcon after its kind; ¹⁵ every raven after its kind,

Not only are you not supposed to eat, but you are also not supposed to eat anything which touches the unclean thing.

³⁵ And everything on which a part of any such carcass falls shall be unclean; whether it is an oven or cooking stove, it shall be broken down; for they are unclean, and shall be unclean to you.

Where do you find ravens? On the dead bodies. So what is God saying now? 'I have commanded the ravens to feed you.' So what is the New Testament parable, connotation of this?

Acts 10:11-13

¹¹ and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ¹³ And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." Peter is a kosher man, even in his vision he will not touch anything unclean.

¹⁴ But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." ¹⁵ And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." ¹⁶ This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

The problem is that the prejudices are very strong. You see, I am saying this from my personal testimony. We have a new entry into our family. She is so different from us, at least from what I understand. You should see how much I am learning from this person who has come into our family, so that I can make her feel a part of the family. Natural, bloodline Eathakotas are there, so another person has become an Eathakota now, in name only, she still has to become an Eathakota eventually. So it is a process of learning for us. In my own home I have to unlearn so many things and I have to learn so many things in order for me to make sure that this person feels accepted at home. You see, unless and until you take a deep dive you do not know. So many things, something which is so natural for us is so unnatural for that person.

So many things you might feel like it is second nature for you, but you come into a body of Christ where it is not second nature for so many people. But what do we have to do? That is what we call as fellowship. Different kinds of people with different backgrounds. The problem is that the Jewish people have a very strong sense of identity. It is very difficult to let go. Habits die hard.

Galatians 2:11-14

¹¹ Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; ¹² for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

'Oh no, what will he think? That I am eating with the Gentiles'

¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

Paul was a kosher Jew, but he is all things to all people now.

¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

How many prejudices do we have? From North India all the way to South India. And in south we have different kinds of south Indians again. East India and west India. But thank God for our church, where everybody is welcomed, from different backgrounds. Do you know why? It is because in Christ the middle wall of separation is broken. Do you know why Elijah has to go through Cherith? Because all his prejudice have to be broken because next he is going to Zarephath to a widow who is a gentile. And how can God send him there unless and until he deals with the prejudice in his heart? Who is going to feed you, Elijah? The ravens are going to feed you.

Elijah is a man just like us. Am I a man just like Elijah? Do I have prejudices? Oh yeah, we have. We have engineering believers WhatsApp group. We have software engineers believers WhatsApp group. Are you a part of a church? I remember, I went to a church few years back. "We are proud Baptists." I looked at him and said, 'Whoa! What a statement!' I am proud to be a Baptist. But you do not realize that you are a papist (sinner). At the foot of the Cross everybody is the same. The middle wall of separation has been broken.

A man who is being pruned at Cherith from all his prejudices. He has to eat the food that comes from ravens. 'No Lord, I will not touch anything which is unclean.' Then die, that is the only option for you. 'I will not fellowship with this brother from a different background.' Then die. So understand, prejudices have to be pruned.

Refining in Close Fellowship

In close fellowship do you know what is going to happen? All your inner things will be revealed. Your envy, your jealousy, your prejudices, everything will come out in close fellowship with other believers.

1 Kings 17:8-10

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ⁹ "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." ¹⁰ So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink."

The widow is a gentile. What is he supposed to do? Live with her for several years. They know your life, he knows their lives. Everything is open, nothing is hidden. Do you know something, if you stay long enough in our church, your true nature will come out, some time or the other. One day it will come out. One unguarded moment it will come out. You can fool some people some time, some people all the time, but you can't fool all the people all the time. So one day your true nature will come out. You can pretend and pretend, and suppress and suppress, one day one test will come which is called as surprise test, quiz. And all your hidden things will come out. In close fellowship everybody knows you.

I remember Art Katz, they were living in a township where there were believers all around. So everybody can hear everybody's arguments, so he was supposed to go to the chapel in the campus and share the Word in the evening. Before he was going to the chapel, he had an argument with his wife. They argued and argued, the argument festered and he said, 'To heck with you. I am going to church.' He left and she came to the door, just before she shut the door she shouted, 'Tell your congregation what kind of a fantastic man of God you are.' And she slammed the door. And the sound and the words that she spoke reverberated in the campus and everybody was waiting for him to come and share the Word. So slowly he enters into the chapel. All eyes on the preacher.

You see, where is this exposed? In a close fellowship. Let me tell you, why do people avoid fellowship? It is because they do not want to be known. One of the things I like about my fellowship with Pastor James and Sister Ailsa is that they know me so much, even certain tweaks in my face they can make out and suddenly pastor will ask, 'What is happening?'

What is wrong?' that kind of an openness and transparency is there. And it is something which guards you. You are accountable, you are closely accountable to the other person now. Whatever you do, you are accountable to that person because the decisions you make will affect them and the decisions they make will affect you. And your lives are intertwined.

Derek Prince, he had a set of 5 brothers who were absolutely loyal and accountable to one another; they share each other's problems, they know each others' lives. Absolutely, lock stock and barrel. They know what each other watch, what they eat, what they read. Nothing is hidden. So every decision that they make they want to have a common consensus before they make a decision. So Derek Prince before he got married the second time, (this is according to him) he says, 'Before I got married the second time, after my first wife died. I got this proposal, both of us believed that it was from God and we both agreed. And we wanted to go ahead with the proposal. But then I told my fiancé – I think we should wait, I want to inform my other brothers and I want to take their consensus before I make a decision.'

So you know what happens? He goes to his brothers and says, 'You know what, this is what I believe, the Lord is leading me to marry this person, what do you think?' and they all said, 'I don't think this is from the Lord, wait.' You know what happened? He called up the lady and he said, 'My brothers are saying it is not from the Lord. You know it is from the Lord, I know it is from the Lord. But I still want to be absolutely sure about this. Because I have not got a green signal from my brothers I want to wait.' They prayed and fasted and after a while, a month and a half later, the brothers came back to him and said, 'This person whom God brought into your life is from the Lord, marry her.'

You know why? They are closely knit. People make decisions. What if you are truly accountable to your group? What will you do? The first thing you will do is you will inform the person you are accountable to, because your decision is going to affect them. Am I right? Think about it. See, you may have many mentors, but you have only one father. I have many mentors in my life, but I have only one spiritual father, who is Pastor James. And one biological father who is here. Only one father, Pastor James, and many mentors. I have many mentors, but only one spiritual father. Think about it, if I say about somebody else, 'He is my father. And you are also my father.' It sounds so ridiculous, isn't it? How can you call somebody else, 'You are also my father', 'You are also my father', 'You are also my father'? What are you? You see, when your lives are accountable to one another, in close fellowship, you know that your decision is going to affect the entire fellowship. So what happens? It is a refining process that takes place. You have to say No to several things because your decision is going to affect so many people's lives. That is what I call as accountability. You see, these are such important truths, my dear brothers and sisters.

Sometimes some people leave the church, for example, it is not going to affect them because they were never a part. But some people when they leave the church it is affecting the church because they were always a part. And Elijah lives with this woman for several years now. All these days he was all by himself. Now, he has to live in the close scrutiny of a widow; she is going to see how he is going to eat, how he is going to sleep, how he is going to pray, how he is going to talk, how he is going to walk. Everything of his life is open to close scrutiny. That is the reason why don't believe every preacher. 'I listen to him, I listen to him,' okay listen, I am not saying that it is wrong. Any preacher that comes you should ask him, 'Which local assembly do you belong to?' 'How long have you been a part of that assembly?' So that we know whether that person is accountable. Do you understand?

So what has happened now? He is refined now. Where is he refined? In close fellowship. His life is open. Do you know what happens? After several years, several months in that house, that woman is shocked with this man's life, that when her son falls sick, do you know what she says? 'Did you come to me to bring my sins to remembrance?' What kind of a life would he have lived? And look at the statement of this woman, my dear brothers and sisters, after this entire episode is over, he resurrects that boy and when the episode is over this is the statement of the woman,

1 Kings 17:24

²⁴ Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth."

Do you know what that means? The Word of God is always true. But is the Word of God in your mouth truth? Do you know why it is true now? I will tell you why, because in Zarephath you have been refined. Your life has been opened to close scrutiny. You have been examined, you are accountable, people have asked you tough questions, you have set

right your life under constant scrutiny. You have set right your life now. What has happened? In that constant, closed scrutiny and accountability, you are pruned and you become true. What has happened now? The Word that comes out of your mouth, what does it become? The truth.

Psalm 12:6

⁶ The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

So what has happened now? He has been tested he has been tried, he has been pruned in close fellowship. God knows that this man is accountable. He can be trusted. And after everything has happened, now he is presented.

His Presentation

1 Kings 18:1

¹And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth."

Tested, tried, in your home, in your house, in your church, for several years you have been pruned, you have made yourself accountable, you have earned the trust of the eldership. Now what happens? The Word of God that comes out of your mouth will be true and now you are ready to face the powers of darkness, to be a minister of the Word of God, to be a witness who will bring deliverance. Let's read the parallel account in the New Covenant.

Matthew 3:13-17

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. ¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

'Listen to Him,' now there is a certificate over Him life. His presentation.

There is a pruning, there is a furnace, there is a cleansing in the fires of affliction or rather in close fellowship, and now he has been presented to be a minister of the Word. Through it all he maintains one important and very absolutely essential characteristic, do you know what it is?

His Indefatigable Zeal

His zeal for God never goes down. Look at his statement in *1 Kings 19*,

1 Kings 19:10

¹⁰ So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

What is his statement? ***I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts;***

That is his testimony.

Elijah was a man just like us. Am I a man just like Elijah? Have you lost your zeal? Sister Ailsa was praying for revival. Have you lost your zeal? Do you have the same zeal that you had several years back? I remember our church when we first began, it was vibrant. People were being added to the church left, right and center. What has happened now? Have you lost the zeal? He is coming.

Titus 2:11-14

¹¹ For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and

glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

We are all zealous for money. Zealous for education. Zealous for so many things, but not God. *How long will you falter between two opinions? If Baal is god worship him. If Jehovah is God worship Him. And people answer him nothing.* What are they? Lukewarm, they have lost their zeal. They have become cold.

Revelation 3:19-21

¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

You have lost your first love. You have lost your zeal, you have lost your passion, you are lukewarm now. You are about to be thrown out of My mouth. Be zealous.

So this morning, am I like Elijah? The question I want to ask myself this morning – how am I prepared? Really, honestly, have I lost my zeal? I ask myself, ‘Lord, revive my church, Lord.’ And the Lord will look at me and say, ‘First I want to revive you. And then revive your family and then revive your church.’ It starts like that. But everybody has to ask themselves, ‘Lord, I want revival.’ “Let Me start with you first.”

Have you lost your zeal? What is your testimony? One thing about Paul is that he was zealous. He was zealous as an unbeliever and he was zealous as a believer. Never lost his zeal. I want to be zealous. I don’t want to lose my zeal, I don’t want to lose my fire. How do you lose the fire? Slowly we withdraw. When all the coals are together what do they do? They burn, but when you start withdrawing, you go away from the fire, it is only a matter of time that you will burn out. You will lose your zeal, you will lose your passion and before you know you are in Sodom and even if Abraham comes and rescues you, you will still go back to Sodom. You know why? It is because you have lost your zeal. I don’t want to lose my zeal no matter what. Some people say that zeal without wisdom is bad. But let us have the zeal, we will talk about wisdom later. ‘I want wisdom first and then zeal later.’ No. First get zeal. Make a few mistakes, burn your fingers. You are so afraid to make mistakes, you want everything perfect. Burn a few fingers, go out, preach the Gospel. When you go to your office, say, ‘Lord, I am here for a purpose Lord.’

I remember some people so many years back, we used to have Bible study everywhere; every office used to have Bible study and from there people used to be added into the Kingdom of God. What has happened now? Bible studies are gone, ministry is gone. Sharing the Gospel is gone. Zeal is gone. Over a period of time slowly the fire has gone. What has happened now? We have to whip ourselves to come to church. Or rather church has become a discipline. His Indefatigable zeal; he was zealous for God till the end. And do you know what he said? ‘Lord, my zeal is going, take my life.’ That was his statement – my zeal has gone Lord, take my life.’

It is like that leper, the four lepers who said, ‘Why should we sit here and die? If we go back we will die. If we stay here we will die.’ What is the probability of living, we will go and fight. People who are zealous take risks. What do they do? They take risks. That is what David did, he took a risk. Jonathan says, ‘Do you know what David did? He risked his life to save Israel. He risked his life.’ That was zeal, zeal takes risks. Mordecai told Esther, ‘Esther, Esther, Esther, your people are going to perish Esther, do something.’ Esther said, ‘Uncle, I can’t do it. If I go to the king he will kill me. Unless the king calls me I can’t go to him.’ ‘Hey, you know what? The beautiful palace, the fantastic food and the royal clothing has made you lose your zeal. And if you keep quiet now deliverance for the Jews is going to come from somebody else, but you will perish.’ Immediately she wakes up. Do you know what she says? ‘Go and tell my uncle, my maidens and I will fast and pray and after three days I will go to the king. If I perish I perish,’ you know what that is? Zeal. She took a risk and God gave her wisdom. She had zeal and God gave her wisdom.

So she went to the king and she said, ‘Please come to my home for food.’ She gave him nice food.’ ‘Tell me, my wife, what do you want?’ ‘Come tomorrow also for food.’ Nicely she pampered him with food and when the senses are nicely down, then she opened her mouth. That is wisdom. But she had zeal first, and then wisdom. Zeal makes you take risks. Otherwise you will sit there and slowly wither away. You will go away from fellowship and slowly the fire will go and one

day you will say, 'What has happened to me?' you will be in Sodom, right there in Sodom, and even after you are rescued you will go back to Sodom like a dog which goes back to its vomit.

So this morning, don't lose your zeal. Be zealous for God. Stand in the house of the Lord this morning. The first Sunday of the fifth month, on the seventh day, for 2023, let us ask God to rekindle our passion for God. If you have lost your zeal, Elijah was a man just like us. But am I like Elijah? Or have I lost my zeal? Have I lost my surrender? Have I lost my accountability? Let us ask these tough questions, because the Kingdom of God is like a steward who is going to ask for accounts. He is a Manager; He is going to ask for accounts. What did you do with the talents that I gave you? We have to settle accounts with God. Therefore let us keep short accounts with one another and with God. *Confess your faults one to another, the Bible says, so that you may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* And Elijah was a man just like us. But he had a surrendered heart. He has a prepared heart where the Word of the Lord could come. He was prepared for the pruning of God, he was prepared for the refining of God. And he waited for the right time to be presented to the others because he was a prepared vessel.

Bible says, in a house there are several vessels. Some for honor and some for dishonor. But if a man cleanses himself of impure things he will be a vessel of honor in God's Kingdom. Ready for the Master's use and He will give you a treasure in earthen vessels. So that the words that come out of your mouth will be the words of God; they will indeed be true.

Closing prayer

Father I pray this morning, for all of us. Some of us have lost our zeal, we have become cold, we do not witness anymore, we don't preach the Gospel anymore. The radiance from our lives is gone. The joy that we had is gone. People don't ask for the reason of hope within us. We just go to work because we want to earn money. Lord, help us not to go to work just to earn money, but to be a witness. Help us not to go to college just to get a degree, but to be a witness. Lord, revive us. Revive us Lord. Elijah was a man just like us. But most of us, O Lord, beginning with me, it is difficult for us to confess and say, 'I am like Elijah,' and yet we want to be a part of the rapture. Lord we don't want to deceive ourselves O Lord. Lord, may You find in this house this morning surrendered hearts. People who will say, 'If I perish I perish.' 'I will take my hands off my life, let me become a prisoner of God, like Elijah the Tishbite who was a captive of God.'

Some of us are captivated by the devil, we are captivated by idols. There is a hide out of the devil inside of our hearts; the hide out of lust, the hide out of pornography, the hide out of covetousness, the hide out of envy and bitterness. Lord, let them come out Lord this morning from their hide outs. Let them reveal themselves and be driven out in the name of Jesus. Let every strong hold be exposed in the name of Jesus. O Jesus, some are gripped by pornography, Lord. Addicted to entertainment, Lord. Some of us addicted to coffee. Movies, entertainment. Wasting our time. The enemy comes to steal and to kill and to destroy. They do not even realize it O Lord, their life is just being eaten up by futility, O Lord, by vanity with things which do not profit. The cares of this world, the pleasures of this life which is choking the Word which is being planted into our lives, that we do not bear fruit O Lord.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, O Lord, let us not fool ourselves, O Lord. Let us not deceive ourselves, because Your Word says that if any man says that he is without sin he makes God a liar. But if we confess our sins, if we come to You in openness, he who hides his sins will not prosper, but Your Word says that he who confesses and forsakes will obtain mercy, O Lord. This morning we want Your mercy O Lord. Mercy O Lord. We want to cry like Bartimaeus and say, 'Lord, I am unclean, I have been gripped with the spirit of uncleanness, and it is eating away my spiritual life. It is killing my energy, my zeal is being taken away. Slowly the fire is being taken away. The anointing is being lost. Lord, there are holes in our lives.' Let every hide out of the enemy be opened in the name of Jesus this morning. Let them come out of their hideouts this morning. Let all this mists be exposed in the name of Jesus.

You Canaanite spirit, you spirit of fear, you spirit of deception, we come against you in our lives in the name of Jesus. Come out in Jesus' name. Set Your people free this morning, O Lord. Thank You Lord. Lord, deliver us and set us free. By this you shall know that the living God is among us. For surely you will drive out the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Amorites, the Jebusites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, all these 'ites' all these demons let them come out in Jesus' name. Thank You Lord. Thank You Jesus. Thank You Lord. Praise You Father. We worship You Father for this day, let Your children experience deliverance O Lord, even through the week. Let them walk in deliverance. Let them be filled with Your Word. Let the anointing of the Holy Spirit rest upon them O Lord. The anointing which breaks every yoke of the

enemy. Thank You Father, we praise You Lord, we worship You Father, we give You glory. Fro in Jesus' mighty name we praise. Amen.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest and abide with each one of us. Amen.