

“ELIJAH, THE MAKING OF A MAN LIKE US.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for the Sermon: I Kings 17:1-7

“Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah.”

This is the beginning of the prophetic era. God started with a priest as His representative (Moses to Samuel), then He used the kings (Saul to Ahab). But then the kings rejected God, and He raised up the prophets.

Don't be deceived by appearances. It looked like all the power was with the kings, with the Baalists, it looked like Yahwehism was in retreat or defeated. The government was promoting raw paganism of the worst sort. Even as a matter of policy and approval, with funding support.

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own. James Russell Lowell

Don't be deceived, despite appearances, the Word of God is powerful and working.

“So he went and did according to the word of the Lord.”

This story begins with the clear reception of a word from God.
Like most of God's words, it contains *a command and a promise*.
When the command is obeyed, the promise is fulfilled.

Elijah heard the word of God, he received it, and he quickly obeyed it.

We see here common elements of how God speaks and calls individuals (Burning Bush, Damascus Road).

1. God initiates, it is God who acts.
2. God calls, He is personal and relational.
3. God gives the specifics of His call, clarifies His purposes, He reveals what He will do.
4. God makes demands, gives commands and promises.
5. God promises provision and protection.
6. God gives a sign.
7. God separates out those He calls according to His own pleasure, for His own glory.

God is real and personal, God is here and God is not silent.

“God has not changed. He still speaks to His people today.”

"If you have trouble hearing God speak, you are in trouble at the very heart of your Christian experience" (Henry Blackaby).

A person who is deaf, dumb, and blind toward God is in darkness and is lost.

The Command: go and hide.

Go and hide. Why does God send him away?

Why not go from village to village and preach and prophecy and call for repentance.

Why not awaken the sleeping conscience of the people? Why not tear down the temples of Baal?

Where is the logic or reason for such a strange action?

Why does God call Elijah from out of obscurity, and then send him right back into obscurity?

Most commentators believe it is for protection, to escape Jezebel's sword. After all Ahab was looking for him, (I Kings 18:10). But too often the seemingly obvious answer is too simple and makes us miss the true reason.

Why does God send him away? To hide something else.

Not just go, but go and hide.

Cherith (Ke-rith) Ravine, wadi Cherith is east of the Jordan in an unknown remote location. The meaning of the Hebrew word is hide, be absent, keep secret, being removed. It is frequently used of God who sometimes "hides Himself" or "hides His face."

The man of God with the Word of God is silenced by God as a further mark of judgment, in fact it is the worst sign of His judgment. "The greatest possible calamity which can befall any land is God's withdrawal of those whom He appoints to minister unto the soul" (Arthur Pink).

There is a famine worse than a famine for food and water, a famine for the Word of God.

Amos 8:11-12 "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land-- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.

Now all the dew and rain was to be withheld from the land, both literally and worse, spiritually as well (Pink).

There are more dreadful calamities than earthly or material ones, the worst are spiritual ones. You know this to be true. If a son's business fails or a daughter's marriage fails, that's a terrible thing, but nothing like a child who walks away from their faith.

God is judging Israel as God does all nations. To the famine of bread and water, God adds a famine of His Word.

What does that famine look like today?

Prayer out of the schools.
God out of the textbooks.
Ten Commandments off the walls of the court houses.
Nativity scenes out of the public places.
Protection of innocent life removed.
God's definition of marriage changed.
Evil is called good and good evil.

What about our own hearts and homes. Is God's Word honored, read, spoken, and talked about?

Deuteronomy 11:16-17 Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them; 17 then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the Lord is giving you.

The Promise: you shall eat and drink.

Every command has its promise.
Every call has its equipping.
Every duty has its provision.
Every Word has its fulfillment.

God commands all creatures and uses them for His glory. They obey His every command. God commanded the ravens, they came twice a day with just enough for that day, no storing up, no hoarding. Daily bread.

God will give enough, His grace is sufficient. What a lesson Elijah learned of God's perfect provision. God wants us to move from self-sufficiency to God-sufficiency.

In a time of spiritual drought and famine, there is food and water from the Lord for His followers. And often from the most unlikely of sources. Don't be too proud to take meat from a raven's mouth, to receive help from others when we need it. His grace is sufficient.

Lessons learned from a man like us for a life like ours.

When you read a text like this in the Bible, do you just read over it as interesting history or do you wonder why God put it here and how it speaks into our lives? Do you try to identify yourself with someone in the story? Are we Elijah or are we the common folks of Israel suffering from the judgment of God?

The dry brook was not a sign of God's displeasure or punishment, but a sign of His pleasure, love, care.

Joseph in prison. Paul being stoned. Jesus on the cross.

Because we are in a hard place or season, doesn't mean we are in the wrong place. Sometimes God calls us to hard places or hard seasons to teach us hard lessons.

Why does God use wildernesses? What are wildernesses in God's economy?

It's judgment for Israel and it's wilderness for Elijah. Why does God call His servants into the wilderness? Why are there so many wilderness experiences in the Bible?

Joseph, many dark moments (slavery, jail) before the light.
Moses, 40 years on the back side of the wilderness, later 40 days on mountain.
Joshua had several steps of preparation before Jericho.
John the Baptist; Jesus; Paul

These places are the making of a man of God.

They are places of testing and preparation and for knowing God. Some have referred to it as the dark night of the soul. It is a place for soul-making. It is a place for meeting with God. What is Cherith but a place of dependence, a place for learning dependence.

Cherith is a place where we are sifted by Satan.
Cherith is a place where we are humbled.
Cherith is a place where we come to end of ourselves.
Cherith is a place where we learn that apart from Him we are nothing and we have nothing.

God calls us into dry and thirsty places, into dark places, lonely places to cure our souls, to remove our pleasures, our props, our pride. A place to die to self.

Don't despise your Cherith ravine. Guard your heart from fear, resentment, or anxiety.

In *Enterprise, Alabama* there is a monument built to honor the boll weevil. It's the only monument ever built to honor a pest, a plague. The boll weevil destroyed the cotton industry of the south and forced the farmers to plant peanuts which turned out to be much more profitable than cotton. Pain led to prosperity. A curse became a blessing.

Dried up brooks become sources of powerful blessings.

A.W. Tozer in his book *The Root of Righteousness*, has a chapter titled, “Praise God for the Furnace.” “It’s doubtful that God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.”

“Affliction promotes holiness: The more the diamond is cut, the more it sparkles” Thomas Watson.

John Bunyan was thrown in prison and wrote one of the greatest books ever, *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

Seek times of solitude and retreat, withdraw from the world, from all forms of media. Go where you can shut out the world and hear God’s still small voice. There are times and seasons to withdraw and hide.

Satan has filled our world with noise, hurry and crowds; with TV, computers, radio, newspapers.

Someone observed that one must go to the brook Cherith before one is ready to stand on the mountain Carmel.

God still does this with His children in a variety of ways.
Don't be depressed if the Lord directs you into the wilderness.

Countless “Christians have been constrained to declare that it was in their imprisonment, or place of exile or sick chamber, that they entered really into their own hearts, and ascertained their true spiritual state” (Krummacher).

In these dry and lonely places, in these places that try men's souls, we find communion with God. These are the times when our walk grows deeper, sweeter. In these times we learn, God really is in control.

“I walked a mile with Pleasure;
She chatted all the way;
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow;
And ne'er a word said she;
But, oh! The things I learned from her,
When Sorrow walked with me.”
— Robert Browning Hamilton

F. B. Meyer points out that we all have to stay by a drying brook sooner or later. It may be the drying brook of popularity, or the drying brook of failing health or a sick loved one or a failing career, or the drying brook of a friendship that is slowly fading away.

“He wants to teach us not to trust in his gifts, but in himself. He wants to drain us of self” before He uses us in some new way for His glory.

The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, and He is still Lord, both in feast and famine.

We think once we have a job or a wife or a child or good health we should have them always. What did Elijah think when the brook dried up? God is still God and God is always in control.

Consider also why did the brook dry up? The dried up brook was a result of Elijah’s own prayer. God’s answers are not always the answers we want or expect.

God’s ways are not our ways, God’s time table is not ours, God’s classes/lessons are not the ones we signed up for. But God is always at work, working all things for His glory and our good.

The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

God’s direction is one step at a time.

Notice how God doles out information about the future, just what is necessary, one step at a time. Elijah knew one thing: he was to go and hide himself in the ravine and that’s all he knew. God didn’t tell Elijah the next step until the brook was completely dry.

Have you ever had the experience of knowing what the first step God wants you to take is but you have no clue what to do after that?

"The path He wants us to walk is faith, and faith is opposed to sight and independence"(Pink).

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.