

“ELIJAH THE TISHBITE, A MAN LIKE US.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for the Sermon: I Kings 17:1-2; James 5:17-18

Introduction.

Try to picture for a minute a stranger, walking unannounced into the White House up to the Second floor, past all the staff and security, and boldly entering the oval office and with authority declaring that all import and export trading will cease for several years until I say it will resume. And then as suddenly as he appeared, he disappears.

If you are reading along in I Kings, when you turn the page to chapter 17 Elijah the Tishbite steps onto the canvas of Scripture unannounced from out of nowhere. Like a meteor flashing across a dark sky. His sudden appearance makes him somehow a grand and romantic figure. We are drawn to and fascinated by this unique character, and his abrupt declaration underscores his mystery.

Who was that masked man? Where did he come from, and where did he go? What did he say? Where did he get such authority?

People of conviction and passion stand out to us. Especially in a cultural climate like ours where it was neither comfortable or convenient to take a stand for God. Everyone fears to get involved. In an age "moral pygmies" Elijah towers like a giant.

F.B. Meyer called him a “colossus among men.”

Alexander Whyte called him “a Mount Sinai of a man with a heart like a thunderstorm.”

Alexander McClaren called him “the Martin Luther of the Old Testament.”

James says Elijah was a man like us. Really? How many of you think that when you think about Elijah? Let’s talk about spiritual conviction and moral authority. Where does it come from, how can we get it? By observing Elijah's life we can see there is truth in what James says, especially if you notice the qualities and characteristics of Elijah are also the qualities and characteristics that make up a Christian, one like us.

First, Elijah was convinced of the reality of God.

"As the Lord, the God of Israel lives..."

He believed God. God was a living reality to him.

Like when Peter declared, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God."

Like when Thomas affirmed, "My God and My Lord."

He was a man of deep, abiding faith. He lived up to his name, as must we all. Yahweh is God.

“Ahab, my God is alive. What about yours? You worship Baal. What can your god do now, your god of rain? Is he dead or alive? Yahweh is the living God, Ahab.”

Is God the living reality in your life? Has the power of God's holy presence so transformed your life that the reality of your God convicts those around you?

Has the truth about God captured your hearts, souls and minds, and that of your family?

Notice also, he doesn't just say "As the Lord lives" but "*as the Lord the God of Israel lives*" He is the covenant God of Israel, the one who had entered into a solemn covenant with Israel, the one with whom they had to do.

Notice also, "He lives."

During the reigns of seven evil kings over 58 years there had been no dire consequences, "so the false idea had come to prevail that the Lord had no real existence" (Pink, p 22).

This is the danger in every age when people interpret the long-suffering and patience of the Lord to be His favor or His winking at sin, or that He is dead. America is a case in point.

We do well to remember Romans 2:

Romans 2:4-5 Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Don't mistake God's long suffering and patience for approval or absence.

“He lives” is a sharp contrast to the culture and prevailing opinion. That “He lives” is also a sharp contrast to the lifeless idols whose powerlessness God was about to expose.

This knowledge of God was a source of Elijah's courage and conviction, and of ours.

We heard the mantra of the people of Ephesus this morning, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.” We have a better one, “Christ is risen, He is risen indeed.” He lives. Are you convinced? Does it show?

Second, Elijah was convinced he stood before God, as a representative of God.

"Before whom I stand," "whom I serve."

Before God. A Christian is a person who is before God, coram deo, a person who lives before God or before the face of God who has His eye on us.

What a remarkable testimony this is. Elijah is not only assured of the reality of God but of the reality of God's presence. He is conscious of being in the presence of the Lord Himself, the very one before whom angels and saints are bowed.

This honor would be extended in a special way nearly 900 years later when he would stand with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration in the presence of the glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

If the Lord Almighty is with him, why should he tremble before an earthly king. "Ahab, I stand before the Almighty Living God of the universe, so you are nothing to me."

One reason we are not bolder and more courageous in our lives is because we have more respect for men than we do for Almighty God. The fear of man brings a snare but he who trusts in the Lord will be kept safe.

Do you know who you are and whose you are? To what or to whom do you belong?

This standing before the Lord also implies a readiness to be the Lord's servant, ready to be used at His beck and call.

"Lord, speak, for thy servant is listening"

Elijah, a man like us, has a relationship with the living God born out of a deep prayer life.

He knows he is called. He has a sense of God appointedness. He knows he is a servant of the living God.

Notice, God has never left Himself without a witness on earth. The lamp of truth has never been extinguished. God has always had His Noah, Moses, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Paul.

Notice how God has always responded to a crisis. He calls an individual into His service. "He consistently performs the miracle of ministry by employing human personalities to accomplish divine purposes" (Hendricks, p 13).

Yes, we are like Elijah. We also are God's witnesses, God's ambassadors, God's servants. Paul had a clear sense of this. He started each of his letters, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called by the will of God to be an apostle."

I Peter 2:9-10 You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Third, Elijah was convinced he had the resources of God.

The Word of God had come to him through prayer.

One of the secrets to his strength was his prayer life.

What is prayer? It is the Christians before the face of God, having personal access to God. "Prayer in private gave him power in public" (Pink, p 24).

Be sure to notice, his prayers were earnest, whole-hearted, fervent, and effectual.

How often in Gilead was he on his face before the Lord?

How many days and night did he cry out with tears for Israel?

Which prayers are you most in earnest about?

Which of your prayers are the oldest?

Where is the perseverance in your prayer life?

In prayer he knew God and he heard the words of God, he heard the truth.

He developed conviction about the reality of the promises and truth of God.

Before God in the Word and prayer, Elijah heard God, knew the heart of God, prayed the Word of God. He knew Deuteronomy 11:

Deuteronomy 11:16-17 Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you.

So he prayed: "There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

What a dramatic pronouncement Elijah makes and how it must have been mocked and disbelieved. Israel abounded in a thousand springs and brooks. Her valleys were fertile, the hills green. From the Mediterranean came clouds full of moisture. How bold and daring was Elijah's declaration. Oh, how he would be ridiculed if it did not come to pass.

This prayer is a direct assault on Baal who is the god of storms and rain and weather and crops. This is a direct in your face challenge to Baal and to Ahab's and Israel's idolatry.

He knew God and he knew God's Word, His truth and promises; His covenant. He knew that idolatry would lead to drought. And it still does morally, spiritually and even physically.

Elijah speaks to us of a life well lived, a life worth living, a life full of the Holy Spirit and truth and the power of God because of a clear sense of the presence of God. With this, one can stand in this world filled with devils and fear no evil, for His rod and His staff comfort.

In Christ we can laugh at the future, sweep anxiety away and stand in the face of evil and say "get thee behind me, Satan."

"As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, Yahweh is God."

Coram deo.

Romans 8:14-17 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Galatians 4:6-7 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

I John 3:1-2 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God.

You are not just a stay at home mom, not just a retired person or a widow, not just a business person, not just a student in school, not if living Coram Deo. You are a spiritual person and everything you do is spiritual, it matters, it glorifies God. Do what you do Coram Deo, as unto the Lord. Monday is as coram deo as Sunday.

Do all you do as unto the Lord and before the Lord.

We are actually and literally in the very presence of God. It is the closest of fellowship with God. It is in prayer that things start to get clear. Here we grow in our love for God and in our love for others, especially those we are praying for.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 10:19-22 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Come in boldness and assurance and confidence because you are a son, a child of God, you have Christ in you. Live with assurance you are one of His.

Elijah announced a season of drought. May it not be so for us. Pray earnestly for the dew and rain of the Spirit to fall afresh upon our dry hearts and lives, and listen for the sound of abundance of rain. May God grant it.

Be like Elijah, convinced of the reality of the living God, convinced you belong to Him and are before Him as His representative in this evil age, convinced you have the same powerful resources of God, His Word and prayer.

"The power to change the world is available to all of us. At any moment, in any situation, we can appropriate God's resources through His Word and the prayer of faith. We can watch God perform miracles in our world and in the lives of people around us" (Hendricks, p 18).

Live coram deo, love coram deo, pray coram deo. Do all you do more mindful of God, as mindful of God as He is of you.

Prayer: Holy Father, in whose presence we live and move and have our being, by the power and presence of your Holy Spirit make us more mindful of you, who is always mindful of us. May your presence with us transform our daily lives, deliver us from all earthly and worldly fears, and set our souls free to love you and others with the same freedom that Jesus had.