

## **“ELIJAH AND OBIDIAH.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Text for the Sermon: I Kings 18:1-19**

### **Introduction:**

Our text is a series of four pairs of conversations. So we will let them guide our study of this passage as we draw lessons for our application. The four pairs of conversations or confrontations are God and Elijah, Ahab and Obadiah, Elijah and Obadiah, and Elijah and Ahab.

### **God and Elijah.**

*“After a long time, in the third year ... I will send rain.”*

This of course is setting the stage for the great confrontation between Elijah and Baal. God breaks the three years of silence and in His timing He calls Elijah and sends him to Ahab.

*The first lesson* for us is the reminder of who God is and how God acts.

**Psalm 115:3** Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

God opens His mouth and closes His mouth.

God opens doors and closes doors.

God opens the womb and closes the womb.

God comes and goes as He wills.

God gives and God takes away.

God opens the heavens and shuts the heavens.

“Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him” (Pink, *Attributes of God*, 32).

Everything is always in God’s hands and He always does whatever He wills. Time and the seasons and the weather belong to God.

*Climate change* is subject to God. The providence of God is over every detail of every weather event on our entire planet. It is arrogance on our part to presume that we can control the climate.

**Psalm 135:5-7** I know that the Lord is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods.  
6 The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth,  
in the seas and all their depths. 7 He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth;  
he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

The same Jesus who commanded the wind and waves now does the same from His throne in heaven. God shut the heavens for three long years, no mist, no rain, no dew.

Is the sending of disaster an evil action of God? Is God doing evil?  
No, the disasters are God's righteous and just judgment on evil.  
The good that God does is divine justice, a higher good takes away a lesser good (rain).

### ***How do we respond to the sovereign purposes of God?***

Our response to a sovereign God will include humility and patience, faith and trust. But over everything else it should awaken in us breathtaking awe and reverence and lead us into God-centered, Christ-exalting worship. It will make us marvel that God in His supreme sovereignty stoops to purposefully save sinners like us.

The providence of God will help us daily to patiently handle the most challenging circumstances of life. May we be able to say as Job did:

**Job 42:2** I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

***“An unknown God can neither be trusted, served nor worshipped”***

(A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 7).

As we grow in our knowledge of God may our awe of Him lead to richer worship, deeper faith and greater trust.

**“...the Word of the Lord came to Elijah ... “Go and present yourself to Ahab...”**

Notice Ahab has been searching for Elijah high and low through every country with all the resources of his government and couldn't find him.

God decides on God's terms when Elijah will be found. It will not be Elijah being summoned into the palace and before the king, but rather the king being summoned to Elijah.

**Ahab and Obadiah.**

***“Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household.”***

***Obadiah*** was a common Hebrew name (13 in the OT). It means “servant or worshipper of the Lord.” The minor prophet of this name came later during Elisha's or Jeremiah's time.

It is no surprise that **Ahab** and his court would be the last to experience the effects of the devastating drought. Notice Ahab seeks a worldly solution to the crises; he sets out to seek a remedy. He does not call upon God or even Baal. Not a word about God or sin. All he wants is relief. We will hang onto our sin until the last gasp. How sad to see the only effect of this long continued chastisement is anxiety for his animals.

**The second lesson** concerns the hardness of the human heart. Ahab goes out to save his animals, not his people, or his own soul.

Oh, how hard is the human heart. What a contrast is this king to King David (II Sam 24:17). The heart is desperately wicked. Unless the Lord changes the heart, it won't change.

**Proverbs 27:22** Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him.

**Jeremiah 5:3** O Lord, do not your eyes look for truth? You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent.

**Revelation 16:10-11** The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

We wonder why people in hell don't repent, here is the answer.

The fiery torments of hell "possess no purifying effect, and the sinner under the anguish of its sufferings will continually increase in wickedness and accumulate wrath to all eternity" (Thomas Scott, quoted in Pink, p 98).

What a contrast between two kinds of men, one who feared God and one who did not. Don't be hardhearted like Ahab, don't let your hearts remain hard by sin or hard to God.

### **Obadiah and Elijah.**

***"Is it you, my lord Elijah?" "It is I. Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'"***

***Notice the two strikingly different approaches to the world illustrated by Elijah and Obadiah.***

Obadiah holds an official high position in the king's palace, like Chief of Staff or administrator of the palace, the chief steward of the king's properties, estates, and livestock.

Who would have imagined finding a devout steward in the court of Ahab and Jezebel? Never forget, godliness can grow and thrive in the most godless surroundings. Our faith and faithfulness does not depend on our circumstances and surroundings.

Elijah works from outside the court. Obadiah served the Lord within the court of the evil king, an insider and trusted member of the king's household. Obadiah is a preserving influence, preserving the Word and servants of the Word. He is quietly subverting the evil plans of Jezebel.

God works through many different kinds of people in different contexts. People with different characters and traits and skills and personalities. There are Elijah's who are upfront, public, confrontational, and there are Obadiah's who are behind the scenes, private, quiet, yet just as faithful.

Both are used of God. *This is the third lesson.*

God has raised up some powerful servants from within evil power structures in the world.

Joseph - Prime Minister of Egypt

Esther - Queen to Xerxes, King of Persia

Nehemiah - cupbearer of Artaxerxes I of Babylon.

Daniel - served in Nebuchadnezzar's court

Saints in Caesar's household (Phil. 4:22)

Some of us are called to work in very challenging work environments. Be faithful to your employer as long as it doesn't interfere with being faithful to God.

However there are major risks with this kind of deep involvement with the world.

Becoming so identified with the world that one becomes lost in the world's values.

Becoming compromised (Lot's family).

Fearing or trusting rulers and powers of the world more than one fears or trusts God.

Notice Obadiah fears Ahab, he is intimidated by powers of this world.

Notice Elijah trusted God and was fearless before Ahab.

We must learn to be in the world, but not of it.

We must learn how and when to stand outside the camp.

We must learn how to keep your saltiness, and the brightness of our light.

We must guard our hearts and lips. Be respectful, maintain integrity. Do what you do as unto the Lord. Don't fall into habits of the ungodly, foul mouth, coarse jokes, demeaning women and children.

“There is nothing wrong in a child of God holding a position of influence if he can do so without the sacrifice of principle” (Pink, 99).

**1 Peter 2:11-12** Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

We are not all called to great works, but all called to good works, faithful ministry for the Lord.

## **Elijah and Ahab.**

*“Elijah is here” “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”*

**I Kings 18:16-18** So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals.

Who is the troubler of Israel?

This is an example of calling good evil, of accusing the godly for the trouble in the land. The wicked will always blame the righteous. *This is the fourth lesson.*

"You troubler of Israel" is not strong enough for the Hebrew, "Is that you, O Israel's hex?" Hebrew suggests one who is consorting with dark supernatural forces in order to render harm.

What a difference from how Obadiah greet Elijah. “Is it you, my lord Elijah?” Obadiah feared God, Ahab has sold his soul to doing evil. You can tell the character of their hearts by how they respond to the presence of God in God’s representatives.

This is a case of rationalization. It’s a defense mechanism involving self-deception to handle anxiety, fear, etc. It is as old as sin (see Adam), we tend to shift the blame for our own irresponsible actions to someone else. “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering.”

Adam - "Lord, it was the woman you gave me!"

Eve - "The devil made me do it."

Sarah - "I gave you my servant and now she despises me." (Gen. 16:5)

Aaron - "You know how prone these people are to evil"

"Into the fire went the gold, and out came this calf." (Ex. 32:22-24)

Saul - "My soldiers kept the best out for a sacrifice." (I Sam. 15:9,15)

Pilate - "I am innocent of this man's blood." (Matt. 27:24)

Scratch an adult and you'll find a child (Getz, 88).

Ahab's wickedness is the cause of Israel's troubles, but he blames Elijah rather than humbling himself and repenting.

### *What are accusations meant to do to us?*

The enemies of God often accuse the righteous of causing trouble and being troublemakers. Accusations are meant to manipulate us and make us impotent by making us think we are guilty. We must not be paralyzed by the ploys of Satan.

If you stand, at some point you will be hated. If you convict someone's guilty conscience you will be attacked. Jesus spoke the truth perfectly, said everything perfectly and He was despised and rejected. You will be maligned, misunderstood, misrepresented. Your motives will be impugned, your character will be assassinated. Opposition is a powerful instrument for shaping and sharpening us, for deepening our relationship with God.

How do we respond to accusations and criticisms? Do we become defensive, accuse or blame others, or do we humble ourselves and repent where we have sinned or done wrong? Do we care more about our reputations and the approval of man, or do we fear God and seek His favor?

What a sad picture of a hard, unrepentant heart we see in the words of Ahab. These are Ahab's last words, he never speaks again. Ahab becomes as silent as his Baal god.

Ahab has broken faith with God and rebelled against the covenant, bringing down the curses of the broken covenant on him and all Israel. He broke the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me."

Elijah gives a clear and no nonsense response. He throws the accusation back in Ahab's face, charging him and the entire house of Omri. Unfortunately Ahab is so self-deceived that he thinks he can do battle with God.

Jeremiah was right, "The heart is deceitful above all things, who can know it." (Jer. 17:9)

Rationalization and deception will be laid bare and exposed. Truth will prevail. Truth must prevail. This story is about truth prevailing.

The battle is joined, the stage is set for a great confrontation in this God-war. We are reminded that spiritual power is always greater than political power, He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.