

“ELIJAH UNDER A BROOM TREE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

November 21, 2021, 6 PM

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

I Kings 19:1-2, What King Ahab said to Queen Jezebel.

Let's remember where we are. The people of God are divided into a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. The southern kingdom is Judah, 2 tribes, with Jerusalem as their center, their kings are all in the line of David. The northern kingdom is larger, 10 tribes, centered in Samaria.

Their current king is Ahab, about whom Scripture says he did more evil than all the kings before him. He set a new standard, a new high in lows.

One of the worst things he did was marry Jezebel, the daughter of the Baal worshipping king of Sidon. She led Israel into full blown Baal worship. She killed the prophets and priests of Yahweh and anyone who worshiped the one true God.

Elijah took on the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and God delivered a resounding, fiery defeat, killing 450 prophets of Baal.

What does Ahab tell Jezebel in I Kings 19:1? What does Ahab leave out in what he tells Jezebel? Ahab tells her what Elijah did, instead of what the God of Israel did. Perhaps by design he paints a picture of everything being Elijah's fault, the defeat of Baal, the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. No fear of the Lord, no mention of the God of Israel.

Notice, the very thing that should convince and convict her and cause her to tremble and fear the Lord, that very thing, only enrages her all the more. The hard in heart will refuse to believe even the most convincing truth. This is what happens when you try to explain reality without God.

I Kings 19:3-8, How God fed Elijah.

How should we interpret or understand what Elijah does in I Kings 19:3-18? Fear or faith?

Most interpreters of I Kings 19 say Elijah fled in fear, weakness, depression.

After great victories we are often humbled or depressed.

Elijah is a great man but also a flawed man with great weaknesses.

We derive some comfort from knowing the weaknesses of great people.

We take some courage or hope or comfort from that knowledge.

Our hero turns out to also be a coward.

Did Elijah suddenly change from a man of power and strength, able to perform mighty miracles to a picture of weakness cowering before a woman? Did he forget the ravens, the widow, Mt. Carmel? We have to be careful doing too much psychology in our interpretation.

I Kings 19:3 Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life.

I Kings 19:3 (KJV) And when he *saw* that, he arose, and went for his life.

Is it saw or afraid? Hebrew can mean he sees and he went or walked, even went for a walk. Elijah saw how things really were and how hard the hearts really were. No one stood up to Jezebel, no one stood up for the Lord.

Elijah saw that what happened on the mountain had not changed the hearts. He was not afraid to die, rather his despair over Israel caused him to want to die, but not at Jezebel's hand, so he left to die in the wilderness.

Elijah didn't have to go this far to get away from Jezebel, so more seems to be up than fear of her. Elijah may not be fleeing so much as making a journey to a specific destination first Beersheba and then Mt. Horeb, a return to where Israel first cut the covenant with their God.

God planned this trip and sent the angel to prepare Elijah for it. This is not escape, this is not depression.

Why does he want to die? Depression, suicidal? Is that the only possibility? He has failed, he was ineffective, no more point to his life. God has another perspective.

Elijah's prayer for God to take his life.

Does God answer his prayer? The answer seems obvious, right? He keeps living so God didn't answer his prayer. Would you accept an answer of yes and no? God doesn't answer the specific request to kill him, but God does answer his prayer, by giving him something better.

This is a common way God answers our prayers, by bypassing the specific request or going around it to give us something better, something He knows is best. So yes God heard his prayer and yes God answered his prayer.

If God doesn't give you specifically what you ask, wait, watch for something better, something that will glorify Him and will cause you to rejoice and give thanks.

Hoping to die, God has other plans. God feeds and cares for Elijah, restores life to his body and soul. God gives him food and drink, and an angel to attend to him in the wilderness.

God's grace is always sufficient.

The Quehrns and the Fosters are experiencing God's grace in ways they could never have imagined before. I told the Quehrns today that I am loving watching God love them.

I Kings 19:9-14, How God revealed Himself to Elijah on the mountain of God.

What is Mt. Horeb all about? What happened here a long time ago?

Mt. Horeb which is Mt. Sinai is in the Sinai peninsula, 280 miles from Beersheba. To make this journey in 40 days means about 7 miles a day through wilderness and desert, unforgiving territory.

What happened the first time at Mt. Horeb? This is the very place where God revealed Himself to Moses. Here the covenant was made and broken, and renewed and restored. Is this a redemptive moment in the purposes of God?

Would you say Elijah is moving away from or toward God?

I like to use C.S. Lewis' phrase from the Chronicles of Narnia. This is further up and further in. Elijah is defeated and discouraged, so he moves toward God, he runs into the presence of God.

The words of the angels suggest that Elijah goes to Mt. Horeb with divine authorization and divine resources. He is here with God's blessing and purpose. God meets him there, and reveals Himself to Elijah.

What does, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" mean?

Is God's question to Elijah a rebuke or an invitation? A criticism or an bidding to speak? Is it an invitation to pour out his heart and unburden his soul before God?

Is Elijah being proud and ego-centric in 19:10 and 14, or just telling the truth?

Isn't it normal for the prophets of God to anguish over the poor responses of the people of God? Elijah is more concerned for God and God's covenant and God's truth than for himself.

He is more upset by Israel's apostasy than his own failure in ministry.

"I am here because of my zeal, passion, burden for the glory of the Lord of Hosts."

At God's holy mountain Elijah brings a formal charge against Israel for breaking covenant.

Elijah brings the case to the judge. The covenant is broken, the altars are torn down, the priests and prophets are either defected or dead. When something is broken, you take it back to where you got it. Here's the broken one, God, replace it with a new one.

What's the meaning of the theophany in I Kings 19:11-12?

This reads like it is the central text, the key moment, the climax. This is great stuff, but what does it mean? A theophany is a God appearance, a visible manifestation of God to mankind.

We are all well aware of numerous theophanies in Scripture, the angel of the Lord appearances to Abraham, Jacob, Joshua, Gideon, Daniel, and of course the ultimate theophany when the Word became flesh.

There a couple of moments in the Old Testament where a much more powerful encounter with the glory of God happens. One is when Moses was on Mt. Sinai and asked to see God's glory.

This encounter in our text is another where the Lord passes by, not in the wind, earthquake or fire, but in a still small voice.

God restrains Himself from the wind, fire and earthquake. Elijah was perhaps looking for a repeat of Moses' experience on Mt. Sinai when there was wind, fire and earthquake. God doesn't issue a new covenant, He says the one you got is still good, my Word is good, go back and enforce it.

God is most especially present in His Word, His still small voice. God may not show Himself present in powerful demonstrations in nature, but God is surely present in His quiet Word of judgment and grace.

God reveals His *power*, His awesome attributes in mighty miracles and demonstrations. But God reveals *Himself, His will*, in His voice, in His Word, as when He gave His law to Israel and when He sent the Word made flesh to all mankind.

Wind, earthquake, and fire are indeed signs of God's coming judgment. In them we see God's terrible majesty, the fiery zeal of His wrath and love, that consumes whatever opposes Him (Keil, p 258). But in them his soul was not helped or assured that this indeed was God.

I Kings 19:15-18, How God encouraged Elijah and strengthened him.

Is God's response in I Kings 19:15-18 a rebuke of Elijah or an affirmation/recommissioning of Elijah?

God agrees with Elijah and reveals His plans and promise by appointing Elijah to go and anoint those who would bring down judgment on Israel, two kings and a prophet to overthrow the house of Ahab.

God isn't rebuking Elijah but agreeing with him. This is not a slap of reality therapy delivered by God to Elijah. This is not "quit this pity party and go home and get back to work."

God's response actually fits with Elijah's assessment, he is not some emotionally depressed basket case. God is pleased with Elijah's zeal for God's glory and God's covenant.

God strengthens Elijah's heart. "I have 7000 more, you are not alone or the only one."

God always has a remnant. God always has had and always will have His faithful people, His witnesses, ambassadors. The gates of hell will not prevail.

God recommissions him and puts him back to work; with a new vision of God, a better understanding of who God is and what He is like, and with a new task, to anoint the next generation of leadership.

The still small voice of the Word of God declares what God will do, how He would bring an end to Ahab through Hazel and Jehu.

Application and conclusion:

With this new understanding of the text, are we able to make suitable applications of the text?

First, there is an application concerning evangelism and conversion.

We fall into the trap of thinking that given the right information or cogent arguments people will respond and change. We think the truth is plain and obvious to everyone.

Let Jezebel be our teacher of the condition of the human heart.

John 3:19-20 This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

The heart is desperately wicked. Unless the Lord changes the heart, it won't change. It is a spiritual work of the Holy Spirit. The only reason our hearts are open to the light is because of a prior gracious work of the Holy Spirit in us. That is cause for worship.

Second, since the battle is spiritual we shouldn't be surprised when we experience spiritual opposition.

It's tempting to say we need a new gospel, the old one isn't working anymore.

It's tempting to say we need a kinder, gentler approach.

It's not a flaw in our approach or how we say it. The gospel isn't broken.

When the church stands for the truth, it is a message of hope or judgment, the path of life or the path of death. The world will hate the light with hostility, hatred, and resentment.

There will always be a battle between the seed of woman and the seed of the serpent.

Elijah had hoped that the victory and testimony on Mt. Carmel would turn the tide in Israel but it didn't.

Third, rather than a rebuke of an arrogant or self-pitying or despondent prophet, this is an expression of God's tender love and care and provision.

God sends an angel. God provides food and water. God provides for a long journey. God meets him there. God responds to his petitions/complaint. God invites Elijah to unburden his heart by asking him what's going on, why are you here. It is a pastoral question. Cast your cares on Him. God meets us in our despair, in our trouble.

Fourth, this isn't Elijah's wallowing in self-pity or an exaggerated sense of his importance or just whining or a temper tantrum or emotional outburst; this is the heart of a man passionate for the Lord and His covenant. He is showing his faithfulness.

Do we ever get upset for God's sake, for God's truth, for God's name? Do we have passion for what really matters or are we all pragmatist?

Is he feeling despondent? Sure, but why? Over himself? Or over God's covenant, God's altar, God's prophets. Is he self-centered or God-centered?

What gets you depressed or despondent or discouraged or defeated? Is it selfish things or eternal things? Are we small minded, is our God too small in our minds and lives?

What do we lose sleep over? Anything having to do with God and the spiritual condition of our world and culture?

Fifth, we must be prepared for the hiddenness of God. He doesn't often reveal Himself in dramatic, extravagant ways. We can almost count on two hands the big theophanies. Is He not more evident in His Word?

His presence and reality are Spirit work, like the wind. Consider again the change wrought in your heart, almost imperceptible at times.

We crave signs and wonders, when we have the Word of God.

II Peter 1:19 We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed [*we have something more sure, the prophetic word*], to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Sixth, the steadfast faithfulness of our sovereign God. In the midst of judgment He will preserve a remnant, He defends and protects and sustains His true church.

God will always have a people on the earth, the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Jezebel and Satan are powerless to do anything about that. This is our assurance, our certainty.