

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

Learning from Those Who Walked Before Us

The Example of a Courageous Warrior

1 Kings 17-21

INTRODUCTION: Last week, as we sought to learn from the lives of those who have gone before us, we looked at the warnings to be heeded from the life of a wicked king named Ahab.

My favorite sermon that I have ever read or heard preached was about this man. The sermon was "Payday, Someday," by Dr. R.G. Lee, the longtime pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, TN.

Dr. Lee was the consummate orator. He described Ahab as

...the vile human toad who squatted upon the throne of his nation -- the worst of Israel's kings.

- King Ahab had command of a nation's wealth and a nation's army, but he had no command of his lusts and appetites.
- He wore royal robes, but he had a wicked and troubled heart beneath them.
- He ate rich food, but he had a starved soul.
- He lived in palaces, sumptuous within and without, yet he tormented himself for one bit of land more.

And Dr. Lee said,

I am so glad that I live in a universe where, when the Devil has his Ahab, God has His Elijah.

Elijah appears suddenly on the scene in the biblical narrative in 1 Kings 17 and without comment or introduction.

I will bless you with Dr. Lee's introduction of this courageous warrior of God. Dr. Lee said,

I introduce to you Elijah, the Tishbite, prophet of God at a time when by tens of thousands the people had forsaken God's covenants.

- He wore the roughest kind of clothes, but he had underneath these clothes a righteous and courageous heart. ...

- He was God's tall cedar that wrestled with the paganistic cyclones of his day without bending or breaking.
- He was God's granite wall that stood up and out against the rising tides of the apostasy. ...
- He was a seer who saw clearly.
- He was a great heart who felt deeply.
- He was a hero who dared valiantly.

And Elijah is the man from whom we are to receive the admonitions of God for our own lives this morning. His story is woven through eight chapters of the Scripture, so I will share with you key passages as I tell you his life story, a story that is summarized by saying that Elijah was one of God's most courageous warriors engaged in the spiritual battle describe in Ephesians 6.

Ephesians 6:12 NKJV For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places

And it is important for us to see what gave Elijah his courage, for we are still engaged in that same spiritual warfare today. First we see ...

ELIJAH WAS COURAGEOUS BECAUSE HE WAS CONFIDENT OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUS WAYS.

After wicked King Ahab had begun to worship the idol of Baal and started the construction of a temple to this pagan god in the capital city of Israel, God sent Elijah to tell the king that there were consequences to forsaking The LORD God of Israel.

Dressed in only his rough and well worn prophet's clothes, Elijah suddenly burst into the hall of the king who had made himself and enemy of the Almighty, and declared to Ahab.

1 Kings 17:1 NKJV ... "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

- God's righteous judgment was pronounced upon a king who had abandoned the God who created him and had allowed him to sit upon the throne of Israel.
- God's just chastisement was prophesied upon a nation, eager in their own wicked hearts to follow their evil king.

Knowing that this wicked king would seek to kill Elijah as soon as it was apparent that the Word of the Lord had come to pass and a drought such as Israel had never before experienced had begun, God sent His prophet to a remote ravine in the mountains of Gilead where the Lord would protect and provide for His servant.

- The Brook Cherith flowed in the ravine, giving Elijah fresh water to sustain him.
- And God caused the ravens to bring His prophet both bread and meat every morning and evening – something ravens, a cousin of crows, would never do.
- The ravens were the delivery drones, but God Himself was the Provider.
- Later, God allowed the brook to dry up as the drought continued, and God sent Elijah to Zarephath where God had a believing widow who would provide for his food.
- Only when he got there, the widow was sharing her last bite of food with her young son.
- But God multiplied the food of the widow to provide not only for Elijah but for the woman and her son as well.

God often changes the deliverer of His provision for us so that we trust Him as the Provider and not the one who brings it.

ELIJAH WAS COURAGEOUS BECAUSE HE WAS CONFIDENT OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUS WAYS.

- **We have many wicked leaders doing terrible ungodly things and demanding our approval and at points our participation.**

Jesus said, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves...." Matthew 10:16 NKJV

- **We must be confident in God's righteous ways, stand for them, and trust God to care for us.**

ELIJAH WAS COURAGEOUS BECAUSE HE WAS CONFIDENT GOD WOULD FULFILL HIS WORD.

When the drought was in its third year, famine had engulfed the land. There were no crops so there was no food for people or cattle, so meat, vegetables, and fruit were in short supply.

Elijah appears to wicked King Ahab. When Ahab's eyes fall on the prophet, he asks, "Is that you, o troubler of Israel?"

Elijah responded, "I am not the one who brought this trouble on Israel, but you have by forsaking the Lord and following the Baals."

Elijah told Ahab that God was willing to send rain, but first there had to be a contest before the people of Israel to decide who would be their God. Elijah told Ahab to tell the people and the prophets of Baal and Asherah to meet him on top of Mt. Carmel.

On the top of that garden like mountain,

1 Kings 18:21-24 NKJV ... Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."

"I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; **and the God who answers by fire, He is God.**" So all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken."

So the priests of Baal built their altar, stacked wood ready to burn on the altar, and picked the bull they wanted to sacrifice, killed it and laid it on the wood and began to pray to their false god.

All day they called to Baal, and danced around the altar, and even cut themselves and dripped their blood upon the altar to mix with the blood of the bull to appease their gods.

But there was no reply, no answer, and no fire.

Then at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the original twelve tribes of Israel and built an altar to YHWH. He stacked the wood, killed and placed the other bull upon the altar of sacrifice.

Then he did something most unusual. He dug a trench around the altar, and he sent people to go get four big jars of water and pour it over the bull and the wood. This he did again and again. Three times they poured the huge jars of water over Elijah's offering to the Lord and over the wood until the water ran off and filled the trench the prophet had dug around the altar.

And Elijah prayed.

1 Kings 18:36-39 NKJV ... "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that **I have done all these things at Your word.**"

Do you see? Here is the secret of Elijah's courage. Everything he had done,

- Appearing again to Ahab

- Rebuking the king
- Proposing the contest
- Soaking his own sacrifice with water
- EVERYTHING HAD BEEN DONE BECAUSE GOD SAID TO DO IT.

ELIJAH WAS COURAGEOUS BECAUSE HE WAS CONFIDENT GOD WOULD FULFILL HIS WORD.

So Elijah continued his prayer, his trust in God and God alone.

1 Kings 18:37–39 NKJV 37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.”

38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!”

The people turned and killed the prophets of both Baal and Asherah.

And God, always keeping His Word, sent the rain again to Israel.

- **There are many voices that seek to discourage us, expressing doubts that God even exists.** Sadly, some of these voices come from men who seemed to be godly leaders, men who fell away from following the Lord, proving they never had really trusted Christ.

As John said, *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.* 1 John 2:19 NKJV

Paul explained that there would be a falling away, and apostasy before the end times begin. That has been happening and continues to happen.

- **We must be confident that God always, always keeps His Word.**

Here I would like to read the words, “And they lived happily ever after.” But folks, this is far from the end of the story, and at this place we have a sad turning of events.

Ahab and Jezebel, especially Jezebel, were so angry about the priests of their false gods being killed, that they put out a murder decree on Elijah!

And how do I say this? Elijah just came unglued. He suddenly lost his courage.

He fled to the desert, far away from Samaria and Israel, and he asked God to take his life. He said, "God, I've just had enough! Let me die." Warning: We are most vulnerable immediately following great spiritual victory!

Is this the sad end of God's courageous Warrior Prophet?

I am so glad to say it is not! God has something else still for Elijah, and through it, God has something more for us.

WHEN ELIJAH'S COURAGE FAILED, AND HE FELL INTO DEPRESSION; ELIJAH DISCOVERED THAT GOD IS THE ONE WHO RESTORES COURAGE TO FALLEN WARRIORS.

At least the prophet knows to seek the Lord and he heads to Mt. Horeb. This is a place where good spiritual habits will help. If you habitually read the Bible and pray, when you don't know what to do, you are likely to read the Bible and pray!

Twice God asks Elijah the same question,

1 Kings 19:9 NKJV And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "**What are you doing here, Elijah?**"

Elijah's response, "I'm all alone, and I can't do it!"

God's response, "Elijah, I've already got the next wave of warriors ready to go."

"I have forces you don't know about." I have 7,000 faithful followers, just in Israel.

Elijah, I know it looks bad where you are, and it is; but I've got this. I always have, and I still do. You can still trust Me."

CONCLUSION:

- **When we begin to feel all alone in our own personal battles, even spiritual battles for the things of Christ, we must turn back to Him.**

We must not grovel in self-pity nor flee from the enemy. Instead, we turn back to Christ. We call out to Him. Trust Him. He has a plan. He has the forces and resources! We read the end of the Book. CHRIST WINS, and we win with Him.