



LIFE GROUP SERMON NOTES

“Church & State III”

Ps. James Lowe - July 12, 2015

WARM-UP (10-15 minutes)

Choose a question below to answer, or ask another. *No right or wrong answers.*

- What was something you used to get in trouble for doing when you were young?
- Were you ever surprised to not get in trouble for doing something you thought for sure would get you in trouble?
- Have you ever freely forgiven someone with no conditions attached when they instead expected negative consequences from you? How did it affect your relationship?

WORD (10-15 minutes)

Sermons can be heard online at <http://www.bethelworld.org>

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6 ESV)

God will bring to completion the good works that he is doing in the earth as well. We must never lose heart even if times are discouraging.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will... (Ephesians 1:11 ESV)

God is so great, so powerful, and so wise, he is able to coordinate all things, including bad things, so that he still brings about his purposes. This is true even when things look like there is no hope for us or for our society.

Elijah confronts Ahab.

The mercy and grace of God is amazing. The prophet Elijah spoke to King Ahab after the confrontation with the prophets of Baal. He spoke about God's blessings coming upon the nation, and that Ahab should celebrate. Yet Ahab had not given any evidence of repentance. It is God's prerogative to govern peoples, rulers, and nations according to his own wisdom, righteousness, mercy, and purposes.

It is the job of the church as it was the role of the prophet to be God's witness, to speak his message. We must not speak what he is not saying. When God surprises us by showing mercy on those we think deserve judgment, we must yield to God's will and ways. We must seek him until we hear him and know what he is telling us to say and do.

Nevertheless, the time came when God chose to judge king Ahab because of his continuing sin. But before he did, he sent Elijah the prophet to confront Ahab and warn him of God's impending judgment.

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. And you shall say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, "Have you killed and also taken possession?"' And you shall say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood.'"" (1 Kings 21:17-19 ESV)

Elijah delivered a dire, ominous warning of judgment to Ahab, who was as arrogant as ever. Elijah could deliver such a word only because he himself was in right standing with God. When there is major sin in the life of God's people, they lack the courage and moral authority to speak prophetically a word of rebuke and warning to the surrounding culture.

Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin. And of Jezebel the Lord also said, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.' Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat." (1 Kings 21:20-24 ESV)

Shockingly, Ahab repented. We never know for certain how a person will respond to God's word of challenge. Therefore, we should never judge a person in advance and give up on them. As long as a person has breath, there is still a chance he or she might come to repentance.

(There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord cast out before the people of Israel.) And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. (1 Kings 21:25-27 ESV)

Even more amazing is God's response.

And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster upon his house." (1 Kings 21:28-29 ESV)

God doesn't do as we often think he should. He is sovereign. He is both just and merciful. In this case judgment was delayed to show mercy to Ahab. He may do the same for you if you have sinned, even greatly, but respond to his conviction with sorrow and humility. He may do the same for people who you regard as enemies who you think deserve judgment. Let us all be thankful that our God is longsuffering and merciful, for we are all in need of his mercy.

PERSONAL APPLICATION (10-15 minutes)

Choose an item below to discuss, or introduce another related topic for discussion.

- Is there any lack of obedience to God in your life that hinders you from speaking to others about following Jesus as the Scriptures teach? If so, what is it and what should you do?
- Is there anybody that you have given up on in terms of their responding to God's will? If so, what would God want you to do?
- Have you given up on yourself because of repeated failures or sins? What does the story of Ahab teach you about God and how he wants to relate to you?

PRAYER (10-15 minutes)

Pray for any of the following, as well as any other requests you may have.

- Pray that God would enlarge our hearts to understand and embrace the greatness of God's longsuffering and patience as especially revealed in Jesus, who was crucified for our sins.
- Pray that God would soften the hard hearts of those for whom we haven't had much hope, and that God would give us his message at this time for them.
- Pray that God would soften our hearts toward those who done evil, especially toward those who have responded with sorrow and humility to God's message.