

A Study of the Life of Elijah;

A Man Like Us.

Sermon # 5

“What Is A Man Like You Doing In A Place Like This?”

1 Kings 18:1-20

You will remember that when we last examined the life of Elijah that after many weeks or perhaps even months of God miraculously providing for Elijah and the widow and her son, suddenly and inexplicably the boy gets sick and dies and that precipitated a crisis of faith in the poor widow. But the “fervent, earnest prayer” of Elijah restored him to life.

There are a least two critical reasons that 3½ years pass before God took action to stop the drought. First, Elijah need time to prepare him spiritually for things that lay ahead.

You will remember that I made the point in the last message that at the beginning of 1 Kings 17 Elijah is called "Elijah the Tishbite," (v. 1) but in verse twenty-four the widow calls him a "man of God." Everything that Elijah has experienced was preparation for what will be his greatest spiritual challenge the confrontation on Mt. Carmel with the prophets of Baal.

And secondly, the people of Israel needed time for the people to lose faith in Baal who was supposed to be the god of rain and good crops. Time had revealed Baal to be a fraud. No matter how many prayers had been offered to Baal, the heavens were shut and the rain would not come. The people were good and disgusted with Baal and were ready to return to the worship of Jehovah. Jezebel's attempt to prevent the worship of Jehovah by killing all the priests, is going to turn the people against her.

I found it interesting that many of the commentaries skip over the story of Elijah's meeting with Obadiah and go straight to the conflict on Mount Carmel. And of those who deal with this passage most have less than charitable things to say about Obadiah. Most seem to see Obadiah as a compromiser of some sort.

I must say that I find that assessment somewhat unfair and see nothing in the text to substantiate them. I find myself more in agreement with Charles Spurgeon who called Obadiah an example of "Early, Eminent Piety."

First, A Fresh Word From the Lord

(vv. 1-2)

“And it came to pass after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, “Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.” (2) So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab; and there was a severe famine in Samaria.”

The effects of the drought in the land had run its course, according to the Lord, now it is time to bring it to a conclusion. Now is the time for Elijah to present himself to Ahab. At their last meeting (3 ½ year earlier) Elijah had not only forecast the drought, but had said that it would end only at his word (1 Kings 17:1). Elijah had unveiled the judgment by a personal appearance to Ahab, therefore he had to personally appear before Ahab to end it!

Secondly, A Meeting with Obadiah

(vv. 3-16)

Now at last the word of the Lord came to Elijah again. “Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land”(v.1). As he journeyed from Zarephath to Samaria, it was not Ahab that Elijah met but a man named Obadiah.

In verse three we read, “And Ahab had called Obadiah, who was in charge of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly.”

Here we are introduced to a man named Obadiah. The name Obadiah literally means, “servant of Jehovah.” But exactly who was Obadiah? The text tells us two very important facts about Obadiah; (1) he was in charge of Ahab’s house and (2) he was devoted follower of Jehovah. Those two facts on the surface seem to be a cross purposes.

Obadiah was not the first man God had placed in such a position of influence. We think of Joseph who God had placed as the second in command under the Pharaoh, in order that he might save his people during a famine (Gen 41:46). We also think of Daniel who served in a influential position in both the Babylonian and the Medo-Persian empires. And of course we cannot forget about Nehemiah who served as Cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. In each of these situations God placed a man in a key position in order to accomplish His divine plan!

Obadiah too was placed in position of considerable influence. He was in charge of the King’s household. In modern terms we would say that Obadiah was Ahab’s “chief of staff.” It was his job to keep everything running smoothly.

Yet we also told that “he feared the Lord greatly” or that he was a devoted follower of Jehovah. Unlike the king whom he served he did not worship the false idol, Baal.

Think about that for a moment, how was it possible for a man like Obadiah to be in position of serving the worst (most ungodly) king who had ever ruled over Judah.

But verse four introduces something even more incredible about Obadiah, for we read, "For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water.)"

While Jezebel, Ahab's queen was doing all in her power to kill off the prophets of Jehovah, Obadiah was hiding them and protecting them. Every second of every twenty-four hour period, Obadiah was in danger of being discovered, and if discovered killed.

Verse five gives the background of why Obadiah was in this particular place.

"And Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive, so that we will not have to kill any livestock." (6) So they divided the land between them to explore it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself."

It was while on this expedition to find grass for the king's horses that Obadiah had a meeting with Elijah. It is a sad commentary on Ahab that after 3 ½ years of famine his greatest concern was not for his starving people but for finding hay of his horses so that they might not suffer.

Verse seven tells us, "Now as Obadiah was on his way, suddenly Elijah met him; and he recognized him, and fell on his face, and said, "Is that you, my lord Elijah?" (8) And he answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'"

It was after Obadiah and Ahab had separated in order search the land more thoroughly that Obadiah comes upon Elijah. Although Obadiah recognized this man, as Elijah the prophet who had mysteriously disappeared 3 ½ years earlier he need some reassurance so he asked, "Is that really you, my Lord Elijah" (v. 7).

Elijah answer, of course affirmative and reassuring. But when he added that he wanted Obadiah to arrange a meeting between himself and Ahab, Obadiah is clearly afraid. Beginning in verse nine he tells Elijah why he believes he is signing is death warrant. "So he said, "How have I sinned, that you are delivering your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? (10) As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, 'He is not here,' he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you. (11) And now you say, 'Go, tell your master, "Elijah is here"'! (12) And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from you, that the Spirit of the LORD will carry you to a place I do not know; so when I go and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will kill me. But I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth. (13) Was it not reported to my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid one hundred men of the LORD's prophets, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water? (14) And now you say, 'Go, tell your master, "Elijah is here.'" He will kill me

When Elijah told him to go tell Ahab where he (Elijah) was, Obadiah was plainly afraid to go. He thought it was a virtual death sentence for himself, because all he knew was that Elijah had shown up at the king's courts three years earlier and then suddenly disappeared without a trace. And now Elijah shows up again. If Obadiah goes to the king and says, "I've found Elijah," how does he know that Elijah won't disappear again? That seems to me a perfectly logical question. However, some commentators take Obadiah to task saying that this shows a complete lack of faith in Jehovah. To me it just seems that Obadiah was counting the cost before opening his mouth, something Jesus himself advised us to do. I think it is clear that Obadiah does not mind dying for what he believes, he doesn't want to be killed for no reason at all.

Charles Spurgeon writes this about Elijah's meeting with Obadiah, "Elijah was the man of action — bold, always to the front, with nothing to conceal; Obadiah was a quiet believer, true and steadfast, but in a very difficult position, and therefore driven to perform his duty in a less open manner. His faith in the Lord swayed his life, but did not drive him out of the court."
[Charles Spurgeon. Obadiah; or, Early Piety Eminent Piety. Sermon
www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1804.htm]

"In the Lord's army there are prophets and there are priests. The prophets are called by God to speak boldly, rebuking sin and calling people to righteousness. The priests are called by God to see the hurting people all around them and to minister healing in Jesus' name..... I have observed that the prophets rarely understand the priests, and the priests don't appreciate the prophets. Prophets often look at the priests as soft and weak, while the priests see the prophets as harsh and uncaring. But both are called by the Lord and both have important jobs to do.

*Someone has to speak out and take the heat.
Someone has to bind up the wounded.*

*Someone has to declare God's Word boldly.
Someone has to help the hurting.*

*Someone has to stand and fight.
Someone has to take care of the casualties.*

The army can't be all fighters and no healers. And it can't be all healers and no fighters. You need both, and you need both at the same time even when they don't always see eye to eye.

[Dr. Ray Pritchard - Sermon Obadiah: A Good Man in a Hard Place - 1 Kings 18:1-15 -
www.keepbelieving.com/sermons/760]

If you are an Elijah, do not despise Obadiah who serves where you could not serve. If you are Obadiah, do not reject Elijah who does what you could not do.

I think that to some extent Elijah understood and even sympathized with Obadiah's predicament. Because he reassures Obadiah in verse fifteen that he would not disappear off the

scene with these words, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today." (16) So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah."

Whether or not Obadiah is completely reassured, he does respond to Elijah request and returned to Ahab and told the king that Elijah was waiting to meet him. Predictably Ahab went immediately to meet Elijah.

Third, The Meeting With Ahab (vv. 17-20)

"Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" (18) And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals. (19) Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." (20) So Ahab sent for all the child-rem of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel."

When Ahab and Elijah meet, Ahab greets Elijah with a cutting accusation. He said, "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" (v. 17) But Elijah met this accusation with some stern words of his own, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals." (v. 18) Elijah not only told Ahab that he was the trouble maker but he also told him why. Ahab was guilty of first forsaking the word of God and as a result he has become a follower Baal. The fundamental problem in all ungodly acts can always be found in the forsaking of the word of God.

In verse nineteen Elijah then orders Ahab to "... send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." (v. 19)

The scene is not set for the get showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

Conclusion

Tonight I want to end our time by just examining two lessons can we glean from a man like Obadiah?

(1) God often places individual believers in key positions in pagan society to accomplish His purposes. Any place that you rub shoulders with unbelievers is a key place to used by God. The greatest influence of believers is often not in the words from their lips but by what is seen in their lives.

(2) It is possible at times to live for Christ and not always alienate non-.believers. Peter tells us in 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. (12) 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.” (NIV)

It is possible at times to live for Christ and not always alienate non-believers. The simple fact is that many Christians alienate non-believers unnecessarily. In many instances it is how they communicate their convictions and not their convictions which alienate people. Sometimes what the unbeliever sees is a believer expressing their beliefs about God in an aggressive manner.