

1st Kings 17: 1; “Before Whom I Stand”, Message # 1 in the series – “Lessons from the Life of Elijah”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall On March 8th, 2017, for those gathered at his home.

There are many good lessons which we can glean from the life of Elijah if we will meditate upon his life and his ministry. It will be good for us if we can understand that we are living in similar days to Elijah, although not quite as radically evil as his were; at least yet. He was living in days where he was witnessing the outwardly observable apostasy of the nation of Israel from God. The false worship of Baals was being heavily promoted by King Ahab. We are living in days where the worship of false gods is being elevated to the level of public consideration; where people really think that the worship of our God, the only true and living God, is not the only legitimate worship. Many in our nation think that somehow all religions are on a par with each other, and that we should respect these false religions of Islam and Buddhism, and the pagan deities of the east. For those who are true Christians, they know that this is not true; that all religions are on the same par; but many have become timid enough that they are afraid to declare the truth publicly or forthrightly, and so false religion continues to gain ground in our country. To speak against it is seen by many as being discriminatory. Bold preachers of the truth of the word of God, are seen as being guilty of hate speech, if they speak up.

But Elijah was not afraid to speak up in his day. And if we are following the Lord in accordance with His word, if we have wisdom and discretion, if we are truly filled with the Spirit, we should not be afraid to speak up in our day either. It was through Elijah that God wanted to demonstrate that He was the only true and living God. He had called Elijah to be His prophet. God chose His man for those awful days of apostasy and spiritual darkness, and we now know that Elijah was a bold and faithful witness for God on many occasions. This evening we want to see, in an overview, what he was called to do as a prophet. He was called, 1st of all, to stand before the living God. 2nd – He was called to pray and to proclaim the word of the Lord to Ahab. May this study be profitable to us all, to help us to see just how great our God is, in raising up men for Himself, to speak to the issues of the times that we live in, as well as to see what our responsibility is, in these days of apostasy from the true and living God.

1st of all – Elijah was called to stand before the living God.

“And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand....’” It was Elijah’s calling, from the Lord, as a prophet, to go and confront wicked king Ahab and to tell him that God lives; that it was because God was living that He was keeping track of the sins that Ahab was committing, and all the evil that he was bringing upon Israel because of his unrighteous rule. God would have Elijah to declare to him what his sins were; and what judgments that he as the king was bringing upon the nation. Those whom God raises up to be kings and rulers, must expect that there will be good counsel from the Lord, which will come to them from God’s servants, to tell them the way that they ought to rule. They ought to rule righteously. They should turn away from all false gods, and worship and obey the only true and living God. Men in authority ought to rule in the fear of God. They ought to know and to remember that our God is the only God who lives. And so, we can make application to our day, that God would have His pastor-teachers in our day, also, show those in public office the high standard of worship and conduct to which they are called.

To this end, I want you to turn with me over to 2nd Samuel 23, verses 1-5 – “Now these are the last words of David.” “Thus says David the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel: “The Spirit of Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.” “The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: ‘He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.’” “And he shall be like the

light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, like the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain.” Now why was it that the Lord raised David up on high? Why was it that God’s word was upon his tongue? It was because God Himself had raised David up to be both a prophet and a king. And David had come to understand what the Lord expected of him as a prophet and a king. The Lord was going to speak by him as a prophet, and it was his responsibility, since he was the anointed of the Lord, to rule over men righteously, it says here; ruling in the fear of God. He would rule considering within himself: Am I ruling as a righteous man? Am I reverencing the Lord and His word to me; attempting by His grace to do and keep His commandments? Have I given Him the highest place in my mind and heart, so that I will be just in my decisions and righteous in all my ways? Am I trying to enact righteous laws which will reflect God’s holy law?

If a man is just and ruling in the fear of the Lord, then he will be like the light of morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds. His rule will be like the dawning of the sun on a beautiful and cloudless morning. His rule will make every righteous person rejoice because it will be so clear and apparent that he is striving to do the right thing in every situation and to implement righteous policies of government over the people; things which will be glorifying to God, and which will strengthen the people’s obedience to God and to the king, or the laws of the nation. And it will also be like the tender grass springing out of the earth; that is, his rule will bring everything good out of the people over whom he rules. They will be eager to implement every good thing which the ruler commands to be done. And their obedience to his righteous rule will be refreshing to all, like the clear shining after the rain.

Because, just as the rain coming down and watering the earth is a picture of God’s grace being given to the hearts of men to do what is right, so everything will be clear and bright in the minds of the people who are submitting to the rule of such a person who fears the Lord. You can see this if you will turn over to Hosea 6: 3 – “Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.” “His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth.” God will establish good things if all people will pursue the knowledge of the Lord. This is what you and I as Christians are called to promote in our communities and in our nation.

So Elijah was called, first and foremostly of all, to “stand” before the living God. He was called to wait upon the Lord for His word to come to him, and then he was to proclaim that word in the presence of the king. But when he delivered that word, he was to be more conscious of being God’s servant than of being the king’s subject, for he was standing before God Almighty, the King of the nations. He was always to consider God, first and foremostly, and what God would have him to say and do, more than his thinking of how his words would be received by the king. Above all other considerations, he was to remember he was God’s spokesman. He was to faithfully deliver God’s word to the king, or to the people of God; not to mince it, or tone it down, but to deliver it as God would want it delivered; whether it was words of mercy and comfort, or words which warned of coming judgments. As God’s servant, he was to seek God’s face so that he would have the fortitude of spirit that would be required to deliver the words of God, on any given occasion. He was to ask himself - What does God want me to say to those in public office? What matters of righteous does the Lord want me to bring to the king’s attention?

This is also what the pastor-teacher in our day is called to remember; that he is standing before God when he preaches the word of God. It is not as though he is called to deliver the direct revelatory word of God to the people, (for the office of prophet no longer exists in the Church) but he is called to be God’s servant and to deliver the written word of God, the canonized and completed Scriptures, conscious that he is standing in God’s sight when he does preach. (This is the New Testament normative gift of prophecy if you will, which still exists today) You can see this principle of truth, if you will turn with me over to 2nd Corinthians

chapter 2, verses 14-17. “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses (or manifests) the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” “To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.” “And who is sufficient for these things?” “For we are not, as many peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.” All New Testament believers, and not just those who are called to preach, should remember that it is God who always leads us in triumph in Christ. He leads us in the triumph of Christ’s death on our behalf, and His resurrection, which has given us life and power to manifest what Christ has done, and what it is to know Him; we can communicate this to people around us. If we are walking with the Lord in righteousness and holiness of the truth, our words and our actions will be like a fragrance, like a smell, like a taste of Christ, to people around us. Some will consider and turn to the Lord because of it, and to others it will appear to them to be the smell of death, because of their love of their sins. But we who are manifesting Christ’s scent, will be fulfilling the Lord’s purposes, in terms of our being witnesses to the Lord; in terms of setting forth the Lord’s mercy to those who will believe in the Lord Jesus, and His judgment of those who will not repent.

2nd – He was called to pray and to proclaim the word of the Lord to Ahab.

“And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years except at my word.” We need to understand that King Ahab was far from being a righteous ruler. If you will turn back with me to 1st Kings chapter 16, verses 30-33, you will see why Elijah was sent to confront him. “Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him.” “And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him.” “Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.” “And Ahab made a wooden image.” “Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.” This was the man whom Elijah was called to confront. The reason that Elijah had the fortitude of spirit to confront Ahab was because he knew that he had been called to this work, and knowing that God was with him, he knew that he would be kept safe as he delivered this word in this personally dangerous situation.

Proverbs 29: 25 – “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.” Elijah knew that he would be watched over and kept safe by the Lord; that the Lord would know how to help him even if he was threatened with death. All called preachers of the word of God need to remember this important truth, that God is with you, to help you to declare His word in the most dangerous of circumstances. He is with you in the preaching, and He is with you in the results and outcome of the preaching; keeping you safe in the center of His carefully ordaining all of the circumstances and results of your work. This means that He is with you in life, and even if you should die, He will be with you to see to it that you are safely in His good care and strong hands. 2nd Timothy 4: 16-18 – “At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me.” “May it not be charged against them.” “But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear.” “And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.” “And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.” To Him be glory forever and ever. “Amen!”

You see here also, that the Lord’s word became his word. “As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.” In other words, since Elijah knew that He was God’s messenger, he also knew that God would do nothing unless He revealed it to him. So if he said that there would be no rain during those 3 and a half

years that there was drought, there would not be rain. And God wanted Ahab to see that he had taken side with the wicked, against Him. God wanted Ahab to see that it would not be by his own word that he would prosper in his rule as king, but rather it would only be by believing the words which Elijah spoke to him that he would prosper. God wanted Ahab to see that this was a personal affront that he had given to Him in serving and worshiping false gods, and that His prophet would declare His judgments against him and the nation.

Turn with me over to Amos chapter 3: 1-8. “Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.’” “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” “Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?” “Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?” “Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it?” “Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing at all?” “If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid?” “If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?” “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.” “A lion has roared!” “Who will not fear?” “The Lord God has spoken!” “Who can but prophesy?” God had spoken His word to His prophet. He had revealed His secret to His servant. Ahab and the wicked people in Israel were put on notice. God’s judgment was announced. The Lord was going to bring this great judgment of draught upon the land of Israel, according to Elijah’s word.

We also need to see that Elijah was a praying man in relation to these things. James chapter 5, verse 17 says – “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.” “And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” Lest we think that Elijah was some extraordinary prophet and person, and this is why he prayed and was able to shut up the heavens, we are expressly told that he was a man with like nature to ourselves. He “prayed prayers” is the way that it reads in the original. He prayed earnestly and it did not rain. He prayed in order that it might be shown that His word, which he would speak to Ahab, was in complete alignment with the purpose and plan of God which was revealed to him; that God would bring this drought because Ahab and some other kings before him had killed the prophets. And Ahab, and some other kings before him had led the children of Israel into idolatry, the worship of false gods. Therefore, Ahab and the nation with him would suffer according to the word of a prophet, this very particular judgment of draught upon him and the people. This is the true and right way to think of prayer, as our request to be of service to God in the fulfillment of His purposes; in supporting and announcing His judgments upon sinful societies and men, and also in pleading and interceding on behalf of God’s people that they might be preserved, and even blessed, during the times of the Lord’s judgments. Let us remember that, when we stand to pray, that we are standing before the Lord.