

**1st Kings 18: 1-6; “Obadiah Fearing the Lord”, Message # 5 in the series –
“Lessons from the Life of Elijah”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on May 23rd, 2021, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

When it says that “it came to pass after many days”, we are to understand that it was the better part of a year and a half. Elijah had probably been about a year in the wilderness near the Brook Cherith, and probably about another year to a year and a half with the widow of Zarephath. Now the time had come, it says here, for Elijah to go and present himself to Ahab. And so, God gave Elijah this command by a direct revelation to his mind, that he should go and confront wicked Ahab, and then God would send rain on the earth. And so, Elijah went. The famine was severe in Samaria and things were getting quite desperate; especially in terms of water for the cattle. And so, wicked king Ahab called Obadiah, it says in verse 3, to tell him what he wanted him to do. Obadiah was in charge of Ahab’s house as a steward.

But what is even more significant for our consideration, is the fact which is related to us in the parenthesis in verse 3, where it says – Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly. It is this statement that I want to focus your attention on, and draw lessons from it. What did this mean, that Obadiah feared the Lord greatly? And, what will it look like for us if we fear the Lord greatly? That is what we want to try and discover. So, 1st of all, we want to see that there are different kinds of the fear of the Lord which are described for us in the Bible. And 2nd – We want to see that there are different degrees of the fear of the Lord among those who really do know the Lord. Let’s see if we can grow in our understanding of this vital doctrine, the fear of the Lord.

1st of all – We want to see that there are different kinds of the fear of the Lord which are described for us in the Bible.

Verses 3b and 4 – “Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly.” “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.” So, we see here that Obadiah “feared the Lord greatly.” And the way that he feared the Lord greatly was to hide the Lord’s prophets, so that they would not be killed, at that dread time when Jezebel was killing as many of them as she could. This kind of the fear of the Lord is to act bravely and valiantly according to the will of God as it is found in the law of God, in order to do it. Obadiah’s personal fear was that Jezebel would murder them all.

But his godly fear was motivated by a love for the Lord; of His word and His people. He said to himself – What will happen if I do not do something about the situation of evil that I am looking at? And so the question that we should ask ourselves is this: What should I do if some of the Lord’s people are in danger of being persecuted or being killed? The answer is, that if I fear God, I should consider what I could do; to attempt to help them and to hide them, if they need this help. What can I do, to prevent them from being hurt or killed? In this case, Obadiah really did an extremely good deed for those who were Lord’s prophets; those who were preachers of the Lord’s word. It was, that he would protect them by hiding them from Jezebel, the one who would kill them.

You and I have not known any of this kind of persecution in the years in which we have lived here, in this free country; where religious liberty, founded upon our Constitution, prevents wicked rulers from acting in this way. But before the foundation of this country, before our Constitution was drawn up, and before the Amendments to that Constitution were put in place, there was plenty of this kind of activity going on, both here, and in many countries of the world. I want you to see that the fear of the Lord leads to a Christian’s thinking proactively. That is, they will not hide their head in the sand. They will protect and hide, if necessary, pastors, preachers, or other Christian people, from those who would persecute them for their faith.

I think we can take this a step farther. Think back now, to the time of the 2nd World War; of Corrie Ten Boom’s father Casper, who took the bold step of actually creating a hiding place in a section of the wall in his house to hide Jews in, during World War II. He lived in Holland, and he

had a good job as a watch-maker. He could have simply ignored the developing situation of the Jews being rounded up, and their being taken away to death. But he believed that since they were God's ancient people, and that God had a further purpose of salvation for them, as people beloved of God for the sake of the fathers, that he should protect them and hide them. His doing this prevented a number of them from being taken away to the concentration camps for extermination by the Germans.

Eventually, he and some of his family ended up being caught for doing this. They were arrested and sent to concentration camps themselves, where Casper and Corrie's sister Betsy died. But these actions of his were very glorifying to God. They showed his fear of the Lord. Obadiah feared the Lord greatly in this regard of hiding the prophets and providing for their needs. How he did this, while he was working as a steward for King Ahab, and doing his work even in Jezebel's household, would be a whole story in itself. I think would have been very interesting to have known the details of it. But, I am asking – What are you willing to do, to protect or hide or provide for, God's dear people? It is something, that if you fear the Lord, you will ponder what you can do, and this will lead to actions being taken, when it is needed.

But there are different kinds of the fear of God. Let me show you some Biblical examples. Turn with me over to Deuteronomy 4: 7-10, and I will show you the fear of God that comes from God's having revealed His law to you. "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?" "And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life." "And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.'"

Now, I want you to observe, that God had chosen the Jews, the Hebrews, from among all the peoples of the world, to be His special people. He chose them as an elect people, and as an elect nation. He ordained that they would eventually bring forth the Messiah, the Son of God, from their midst. God was going to use them mightily, to show the whole world, that in order to know Him, they had to fear Him. And to fear Him was not simply to be afraid of Him, but it was to reverence Him. They were to remember that they as a people had been brought near to Him, and because God had done this, that they should remember to call upon Him, for whatever they needed.

They were to fear Him (that is, they were to pay close attention to His word, and regard Him as holy), because He had given them statutes and righteous judgments in His law, and He had set these before them so that they might do them. He also warned them to take heed to themselves to diligently keep themselves from forgetting the things which their eyes had seen; the way that God had brought them out of Egyptian bondage and had provided for all of their many needs, both physically and spiritually, lest His fear might depart from their heart. All of this was an example for our sakes, so that we might learn to fear the Lord our God in our hearts, and that His fear would remain there. It will remain there if you will believe that this fear pleases God.

But I want you to see, even though this was true, that it was the hearing of God's words that opened the door for them, to learn to fear God all the days of their life. If they really received God's word, and it was accompanied by the grace of the Spirit's working in their heart, they they would be established in their walk with Him. And so, when they were learning God's word, and when they were living it out, by faith in God who gave it to them, then they could go about to teach their children to fear Him as well. If they would reverence Him, if they would have faith in Him, and go about to obey Him all their days, then they would truly be blessed. Why didn't many of the children of Israel fear the Lord, as Obadiah in our passage did? I believe that it was because many of them didn't really know the Lord. They thought that they should pursue righteousness only a

generally outward way. They ultimately needed to have their hearts changed by grace. And this is something which they could pray and ask God for.

Turn with me over to 1st Kings chapter 8: 37-43. Here we have the prayer of Solomon at the dedication to the temple. He is praying to God, and showing us the truth of how to learn to fear of the Lord in Old Covenant days; the importance of prayer for ourselves as well, in learning the fear of the Lord in New Covenant times. “When there is a famine in the land, or pestilence, blight, or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers; when their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities; whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward this temple: then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You, only You, know the hearts of all the sons of men), that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our father.”

“Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, but has come from a far country for Your name’s sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your strong hand and Your outstretched arm, when he comes and prays toward this temple, hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by Your name.” The real reason that many of the children of Israel did not fear the Lord was because they did not know the plague of their own heart.

And, we can also say that they did not pray in faith to be to be taught the fear of the Lord. God knows the hearts of all men, and gives to all according to their ways. But if a person in New Testament times will pray and ask for the forgiveness of their sins, through Jesus Christ, they most surely will be forgiven, and they will come to know the reality of His name being holy. When a person comes to realize that God is holy, they should pray to be taught the fear of the Lord. Look with me at Psalm 34: 8-10. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” “Oh fear the Lord, you His saints!” “There is no want to those who fear Him.” “The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.” “Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.”

This is the real reason that more people do not fear the Lord; they do not taste to see whether the Lord is good; they will not trust in Him for salvation from sin. And further, we can say that even Christians do not seek the Lord for every good thing, as they should. It is for this reason that some Christians really lack what they could have, if they would only pray for it. “You have not because you ask not,” says James. But David says that those who seek the Lord will not lack any good thing. And the best of all of God’s blessings is that He Himself can, and He will teach you the fear of the Lord, by His Spirit working in your heart in relation to your going about to do and to keep the commandments of the Lord.

2nd – There are different degrees of the fear of the Lord among those who do know the Lord.

“Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly.” He not only feared the Lord, but he feared Him greatly. He feared Him above most men. This shows that there are degrees of the fear of the Lord among those who know the Lord. This will be confirmed for us if we will turn over to Nehemiah 7, verse 1. It says here – “Then it was when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah, the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.” So, Nehemiah had been rebuilding the walls of the city of Jerusalem which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar years before. And now that his work was completed, he was going to return to Persia, where he had previously been serving the king there. When he finished building the walls, and had hung the doors, appointed gatekeepers and singers and Levites to minister for the city that would be built, he gave the charge of Jerusalem to these 2 faithful men,

his brother Hanani and Hananiah. Hananiah was the best, most qualified man for the job of governing, because he feared the Lord more than many; more than most.

Those who attain to the highest degree of fearing the Lord among all those who know the Lord, are those who will be able to resist all the greatest temptations that men around them will present them with; temptations to compromise their duty in the task of leadership when it comes to their keeping the commandments of God, in relation to ruling justly, or acting righteously. Nehemiah knew that Hananiah would be a man who would not take a bribe, and he would not pervert justice. He would not turn to the right hand or the left in serving the Lord. He would protect the city, and he would see to it that no enemies would be able to undermine the work which they had already accomplished.

This faithful man, because he feared the Lord more than many, would go about to see to it that the worship of the Lord would be set up, and that it would be faithfully maintained. He would rule over the people in righteousness and faithfulness. He would lead them to greater faithfulness to the Lord, and to greater faithfulness in relation to all of their assigned duties. He would judge for the Lord, and he would not show partiality to men. He probably thought of it in the same way that Jehoshaphat did after he had won the battle in which wicked Ahab was killed. He returned safely to his house in Jerusalem, and he no doubt was shaken up by Ahab's death and wondering how the Lord would deal with him. God would send him a prophet to tell him what he should expect.

Turn with me over to 2nd Chronicles 19: 1-10. "Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem." "And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, 'Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?' "Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you." "Nevertheless good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land and have prepared your heart to seek God." "So Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem; and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, and brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers." "Then he set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, 'Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment.'

"Now therefore, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes." "Moreover in Jerusalem, for the judgment of the Lord and for the controversies, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and priest, and some of the chief fathers of Israel, when they returned to Jerusalem." "And he commanded them, saying, 'Thus you shall act in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and with a loyal heart: Whatever case comes to you from your brethren who dwell in their cities, whether of bloodshed or offenses against law or commandment, against statutes or ordinances, you shall warn them, lest they trespass against the Lord and wrath come upon you and your brethren.' "Do this, and you will not be guilty." "And take notice: Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the Lord; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king's matter; also the Levites will be officials before you." "Behave courageously, and the Lord will be with the good."

This is what it meant to fear the Lord in Old Covenant times. To fear the Lord in the New Testament times means the same thing, basically; to be staunchly loyal to God. It is to behave yourself courageously in doing what is right, and to have regard to God's word in all things. These principles must be taken notice of, and lived by, to the glory of God if you would make progress in growing up in Christ, in the fear the Lord. Jehoshaphat knew the Lord, but he had a tendency to want to ally himself with men who did not fear God, and this was a great hindrance to his being a God-fearing man himself for many years. Fortunately he repented of this sinful compromise and he listened to the faithful warnings given to him by Jehu the son of Hanani the seer. You and I must take heed to preached word to listen to it, and to live by it courageously in the midst of a compromising generation.

