

**1<sup>st</sup> Kings 18: 7-16; “Obadiah & The Fear of Men”, Message # 6 in the series –  
“Lessons from the Life of Elijah”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

In our last study we looked at Obadiah’s fearing the Lord greatly. Now, we need to take a look at Obadiah’s fearing a man greatly – in this case, the king, Ahab. Obadiah came into this sudden fear when he providentially met up with Elijah while he was on a mission with king Ahab seeking for water for the dying cattle. He and Ahab had divided the land between themselves in their search for the water, and Ahab went one way and Obadiah the other. And when Obadiah suddenly came upon Elijah, he recognized him, and said – “Is that you, my lord Elijah?” And Elijah, when he realized that it was Obadiah, the first thing he said to him was – “It is I.” “Go, tell your master, ‘Elijah is here.’”

And, at that very moment, we find that fear immediately came into Obadiah’s heart; a fear that he would be killed, if he went back and told Ahab that he had seen Elijah. This was not the fear of God, but rather it was the fear of man. And so, the lesson that God would have us to learn at this hour is that it is very important that we address the fear of man in our hearts, so that we will be able to do God’s good will in the various situations where we might feel threatened by someone who is in authority over us.

The way that I want to approach this is for us think together about the 2 questions which Obadiah laid before Elijah on account of his fear; questions which may come to our own minds as well when we are trying to do the right thing, and we cannot see how doing God’s will, will keep us safe, or be profitable to us at all. We 1<sup>st</sup> of all want to look at Obadiah’s question to Ahab – “How have I sinned, that you are delivering me into Ahab’s hand?” (verses 7-11) And then 2<sup>nd</sup> ( a question which is somewhat implied, more than clearly stated) – Is this the way that God rewards a person who fears Him, by sending them into the danger of possibly being killed? (verses 12-16)

**1<sup>st</sup> – Let’s look at Obadiah’s question to Ahab – “How have I sinned, that you are delivering me into Ahab’s hand?”**

Now, you may remember that this question has come up once before with Elijah. We heard this same kind of language coming from the lips of the widow of Zarephath back in chapter 17, verse 18; “What have I to do with you, O man of God?” “Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to kill my son?” This should show us that whenever any tragedy, or danger, or calamity occurs in our lives, that we might be tempted to associate it with our past sins. And it is true that sometimes you might believe this to be the case; but you should understand, that from God’s perspective it is never the case, if you are a true Christian. As a Christian, one who has trusted in the Lord for the forgiveness of all of your sins, you should always remember that God chooses not to remember your sins anymore, because of Christ. And He does not reward you according to your iniquities. Let’s look at a wonderful set of verses to prove this to ourselves.

Look with me over at Psalm 103: 6-12 – “The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.” “He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.” “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.” “He will not always strive with us, or will He keep His anger forever.” “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.” “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

You can see here that God in His character is righteous and just, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. King David, the man who wrote this Psalm, is speaking on behalf of all those who know the Lord among the children of Israel; those who had received grace and who now feared God. He shows them, and us, that God does not deal with righteous people, those whom He saves by His grace, in the same way that He deals with wicked people. His mercy is great towards those who fear Him. And as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed their

transgressions from them. With them He does not keep His anger forever, and He does not deal with them according to their sins.

David explains this by saying in verse 10b that God has not punished believers according to their iniquities. Is there really punishment for true believers? Well, we know that whatever punishment comes to the believer it is really only the disciplinary actions of the Lord to teach them, and correct them, and bring them to a right way of thinking and doing things. Chastening is not a punishment to harm them in any lasting sense. It is given in order that we, as believers, might share in His holiness. “He will not always strive with us nor will He keep His anger forever,” it says in verse 9 of Psalm 103. But with a wicked unrepentant person, He keeps His anger forever.

And Hebrews 12: 10 says: “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” But turn with me over to Jeremiah 31: 33 and 34. “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord.’ “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Now, I want you to see here that God is relating to Jeremiah, that in the New Covenant that He would give to the seed and nation of Israel, the great promises mentioned here; promises of certain and everlasting good, that were not going to be bestowed on every Jewish person in the nation of Israel, but rather this eternal good would be bestowed upon every single one of God’s Israel; every single elect person whom God Himself would include in this New Covenant. He would put His law in their minds, and He would write it on their hearts, and He would be their God and they would be His people.

There would no longer be any need to teach the elect Jewish people to know the Lord; to tell them that they needed to be saved; that they needed Christ. They would know that they needed Christ, and New Covenant grace, from the least of them to the greatest of them; those whom God had given the grace of regeneration to, those whom He called to Himself with an everlasting love. This gift of grace to know the Lord, would most certainly come from God’s having applied His purposed grace in effectually calling particular sinners, Jew or Gentile, so that they would most definitely and certainly come to know Him. And the outcome of this purposed and applied grace is that God will forgive their iniquity, and their sin He will remember no more. It does not say He would forgive their “sins” (plural) here (although that is true); it says that He would forgive their “sin” (singular). He would not bring the whole body of their sin into remembrance, to punish them for it because of Christ.

In practical terms, He is declaring that He will not bring the person trusting in His New Covenant promises of Christ, into situations of difficulty, danger, and calamity, on account of their sins. He would not contemplate casting them off forever for their sins. But it would be that because He loves them, He would discipline them for any sins which they might try to continue in, or try to hold on to. He will not permit them to continue indefinitely in sin that grace might abound. But this is a great deal different than His remembering their sins, and condemning them for them, and bringing them into judgment for them. This does not happen to any believer under the New Covenant, whether they lived in Old Testament times or New.

In fact, there are some very encouraging words which are given to the elect Jews and to all who are included in the Covenant of Redemption and Grace which are found in Jeremiah 32: 40-42 – “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts so that they will depart from Me.” “Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.” “For thus says the Lord: Just as I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will bring on them all the good that I have promised them.” This is the way that it is for all

those who are trusting in the Lord in relation to His promise of showing them faithful lovingkindness to them; that for His part, He will not turn away from doing them good.

This man Obadiah, even though He lived in Old Covenant times, was being dealt with by God, according to the working of the Holy Spirit when he hid the prophets in caves. He feared the Lord greatly, and this fear he had come by, by God's sovereign grace working in his heart. He was being led into all of the truth of what God would have him to learn about himself, and all of the righteous attitudes he needed to learn, and all the righteous actions which he needed to take, in order to glorify God with his life. At this particular time in his experience as a believer, he needed to be taught about how to handle his fears. He was fearing what Ahab the king might do to him, more than he feared God.

He feared that if he obeyed Elijah and went to Ahab to tell him that he had met with Elijah, if he returned from Elijah with a message for Ahab from Elijah, without bringing Elijah in, as the sought-for criminal that Ahab thought that he was, that Ahab would have him put to death. It was not his sin that was the reason that Elijah was sending him to Ahab. It was that God would teach him how to deal with his fears by means of His grace.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – There is an implied question coming from Obadiah to Elijah – Is this the way that God rewards a person who fears Him, by sending them into the danger of possibly being killed? (verses 12-16)**

Verse 12 of our text – “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.” So, we have now seen the fact that since this widow and Obadiah lived in Old Covenant times, they did not see, as clearly as New Testament believers can, the doctrine of justification by faith alone. We can see much more clearly with all of our New Testament Scriptures in front of us. But, even though they could not see as clearly as we can, still God still had His ways of teaching them.

In fact I must observe to you that in these two particular cases of the widow and Obadiah, the tragedy and the danger which came to them, arose in relation to the work which Elijah was called to do as a prophet. God would have them learn great lessons of truth through Elijah and He would have them to learn to receive his ministry to them. And this is the same way it is today with you, in relation to the one who preaches to you the word of God. God has given the man who preaches to you, me, a ministry to you in particular. And He would have you to learn from me what is God's good will toward you in Christ; how God Himself will lead you in His truth and teach you.

And in both of these cases which I have mentioned, the widow of Zarephath and Obadiah, God was teaching them His ways, and He was showing them His goodness and kindness through Elijah's ministry to them. In the case of the widow of Zarephath, He would show her, through Elijah, His power to raise the dead, and in this good way, He would build a stronger faith in her. In the case of Obadiah, He would show him how to deal with his fears. Elijah was not fearful of going once again to confront Ahab. But Obadiah certainly was fearful of Ahab's reaction towards himself, and so he was questioning God's leading him into this dangerous situation. Therefore, we need to ask this question: How does a Christian, one who fears the Lord, deal with their fears? I believe that the answer is to trust in the Lord and not to trust in men.

Turn over to Psalm 118: 1-9 with me. “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!” “For His mercy endures forever.” “Let Israel now say, “His mercy endures forever.” Let the house of Aaron now say, “His mercy endures forever.” “Let those who fear the LORD now say, ‘His mercy endures forever.’” “I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.” “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear.” “What can man do to me?” “The LORD is for me among those who help me; Therefore I shall see my desire on those who hate me.” “It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in man.” “It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in princes.”

Now, there is a very important principle to learn here, which every Christian needs to learn, and that is, that when the Lord is on your side, you need not fear, and by God's grace working in your heart, you will not fear. You will realize that since He is for you among those who help you, you shall, as Christ did, see your desire on those who hate you. For Christ has overcome and He will help you to overcome your enemies. The principle of truth that we should all live by, is that it is always better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes, or kings, or other rulers. The Lord's mercy endures forever. Obadiah questions Elijah about his going to Ahab to tell him that Elijah was going to show himself to him. In verse 13 he says: "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, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water?" "And now you say, 'Go, tell your master, 'Elijah is here!' " "And he will kill me."

Elijah doesn't allay Obadiah's fears; he simply tells him the truth in verse 15 – "Then Elijah said, 'As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today.'" Elijah doesn't try to allay Obadiah's fears; rather, he simply tells him what will most certainly come to pass. And so it says in verse 16 – "So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah." What was it that convinced Obadiah to go ahead and go back to Ahab? I think that it was Elijah's faith in God and his strong confidence of what the Lord would do to help him to declare God's word to this wicked man.

It was Elijah's strong confidence in God that also gave Obadiah the confidence that he needed, that the Lord would help him too. The strength of our faith will help others to believe also in times of doubt and fear. This is what is important to remember when we are tempted to fear men more than God. If we will put our trust in God to obtain strength to do His will, He will then strongly support us in our mind and heart in the time of greatest need. Look with me at Psalm 27: 1-7 – "A Psalm of David. "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" "The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" "When the wicked came against me To eat up my flesh, My enemies and foes, They stumbled and fell." "Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident."

"One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple." "For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock." "And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD." "Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice!" "Have mercy also upon me, and answer me."

This is the principle that God would have us to learn; that even though an army may encamp against me, that my heart need not fear. Because God is watching over me; He is actually protecting me, and caring for me. Even if I die at the hands of wicked men, the Lord will be with me to lift me up to Him. Look also at Psalm 56: 1-4 – "Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up; fighting all day he oppresses me." "My enemies would hound me all day, for there are many who fight against me, O Most High." "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You." "In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear." "What can flesh do to me?"

This I say, is the principle of faith in God that Obadiah saw in Elijah, and it strengthened him, in accordance with the grace of God working in his own heart, to overcome his fear, and to go to Ahab and give him the announcement that he had seen Elijah, and that he would present himself to him that day. Let it be that same principle which works in us.

