

**1st Kings 20: 1-30; “The Gospel Offered to Ahab” Message # 13 in the series –
“Lessons from the Life of Elijah”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on August 29th, 2021, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

In this message I want to show you how the gospel was offered to Ahab at this critical time in his life. There is no doubt in my mind that Ahab was under the wrath of God. But here we find a prophet speaking many encouraging words to Ahab, words which proclaim to him that mercy, truth, and hope are all found when we look to God in faith. At this particular time in Israel's history, God would strive with king Ahab through this prophet, strive with him to see whether he would believe in Him or not, and strive with him so that he would think about repenting of all of his sins. When Ahab saw the Lord's goodness and mercy to him in this great deliverance that God would bring about, he still would not change. But still, God would have his prophet speak to him and declare to him God's promises of help and deliverance to him.

This has implications for us today in our preaching and sharing of the gospel and the word of God to people around us. 1st of all – I want you to see that it was the right thing to do, for this prophet to declare the mercy of the Lord. (verses 1-21) And 2nd – God's offer of bringing real hope to Ahab was sincere, but he rejected it. (verses 22-30) May our study help us to understand better how we might help sinful men and women around us to see the truth.

1st of all – It was the right thing to do, to declare the mercy of the Lord to Ahab.
(verses 1-21)

In this chapter none of the prophets of the sons of the prophets are mentioned by name. I believe that this was done for a reason; and that reason is, so that we will look more closely at the office of the prophet itself, and not be distracted by the personalities of particular men. We will only be looking at the first of these unnamed prophets at this time, the one who spoke to Ahab about God's giving Him help in defeating the king of Syria. This man had a difficult job because Ahab was a very wicked king, but God would have him preach the gospel to him in terms of his and Israel's being delivered from the king of Syria. In connection with this, we have here a very amazing story of how God humbled a very proud, selfish, covetous, and violent man, Ben-Hadad the king of Syria.

God did not save Ben-Hadad's soul, but He humbled him for His own purposes. God's purpose in his humbling of this wicked king was in order that He might show His mercy to Ahab and to Israel, so that they might trust in the Lord. We need to see that even though Ahab was such a wicked king, that God still had a general love for him as someone whom He had created; someone who had received much common grace. God had this general love for Israel, and a He had a particular love for all of His elect people in Israel. And that is why He displayed His mercy in this way, and at this time. Ben-Hadad had this great perverted lust to be a conquering king, and to enjoy all the spoils of his unrighteous war against Ahab. He wanted to take away Ahab's silver and gold, and the loveliest of his wives and children.

What a wicked man he was. We also sadly find Ahab acting like quite a wimp in this whole interchange. He did not immediately seek the Lord, but he did immediately capitulate. That is, he agreed to Benhadad's sinful way of thinking. He said– If you ask for my finest possessions, and my wives and my children, I will agree to it. That is what Ahab said in verse 4. He said – “Just as you say, I and all that I have are yours.” Now, he really did not need to say this at all, if he had been a believer in God. But he was not a believer in God, and therefore he had no moral courage. He was not able to refuse this man, even if he had thought that Syria's army was stronger than his, which we shall see, was obviously the case, humanly speaking. The proud Ben-Hadad, trusting in the strength of his superior numbers, insists on his sending his servants to Ahab the next day, to search his house and whatever is pleasant in Ahab's eyes, he would take it away.

In verse 7 we find that Ahab called all the elders of the land and said – Notice how this man seeks trouble, and the elders wisely tell him not to take all of these bullying threats from Ben-Hadad. They say to Ahab – Do not listen or consent to him. So the king refused them and Ben-Hadad told him that he was coming him with all of his forces. What was the gospel that this prophet preached to Ahab? It is found in verse 13 – “Suddenly a prophet approached king Ahab and said to him – “Have you seen all this great multitude?” “Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” What a gospel of mercy is preached to Ahab here in a moment’s notice.

Ahab should have shouted – “Hallelujah”, praise the Lord for His mercy! Praise Him for His help to me! Instead, we find him immediately questioning the statement. He says – “By whom?”, as though some other national power will come to His rescue, or some other persons that he had not known about, would suddenly appear on the scene. But the prophet patiently explains it to him in this very reasonable way – “Thus says the Lord: ‘By the young leaders of the provinces.’” God was going to deliver Ahab and all Israel in this wonderful way. God was going to reveal His power and His ability to deliver from a multitude of enemies, and Ahab should have been able to reason from the lesser to the greater. He should have said to himself – If God can deliver me from all of my earthly enemies, then He can also deliver me from the multitude of my sins. But he did not see the connection.

Ahab hadn’t even considered this possibility, that God could somehow deliver this great army of people who were coming against him. He did not even know the state of his own army. He says – “And who will set the battle in order?” And the prophet tells him – “You.” And so he did so. And the young leaders of the provinces went out at noon, and Ben-Haddad and the 32 kings helping him, it says in verse 16, were getting drunk at the command post.” The young leaders of the provinces went out of the city with the army following them, and each one killed his man; so the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them, and Ben-Hadad escaped on a horse with the cavalry. And the king of Israel went out and attacked the horses and chariots, and killed the Syrians with a great slaughter.”

And the prophet came to him and said – “Go strengthen yourself; take note, and see what you should do, for in the spring of the year the king of Syria will come up against you.” And what is truly amazing here, is that Ahab did not pray or praise God in thanksgiving for this great deliverance. There is nothing said here that makes us believe that Ahab was at all thankful. What then was the purpose of all this mercy shown to Ahab by God? Why didn’t God simply allow Ben-Hadad to come in and wipe out Ahab and Israel at this point? It was because God was taking the time to strive with Ahab. He was showing him that he really ought to be believing in Him. But ultimately, this mercy was shown so that God could demonstrate to Ahab and to all Israel that He was perfect in His goodness, and He was just in His dealings with Ahab and with all Israel.

God is good even to unrighteous and evil men. He would mercifully give the gospel in a pictorial form to Ahab and all Israel, even in their sinful state; even in their helpless state, against such a great foe. The gospel offer to them was this. Ahab and many in Israel were great sinners against the Lord. They had been idolaters and sinners in many ways against Him. God’s righteous wrath was upon Ahab and all the nation. He had raised up Ben-Hadad of Syria to strike terror into the hearts of the wicked in Israel. This is what they deserved. The king deserved to have everything good taken away from him. He and Jezebel had set up the worship of false gods in the place of the worship of the true and living God, and they had not repented of it when Elijah had called down fire from heaven on the altar of sacrifice that he had dedicated to the Lord.

They had not repented when Elijah slew the prophets of Baal at the Brook Kishon. They had not repented when God lifted the judgment of having no rain for 3 years and brought a plentiful

rain. It was only right that he would permit Ben-Hadad to act out his wickedness in relation to all that Ahab held dear. The prophet would rebuke the unbelief of Ahab by His showing him this great mercy. Turn with me over to Psalm 33, verses 10-22. “The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.” “The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations.” “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, The people He has chosen as His own inheritance.”

“The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men.” “From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.” “No king is saved by the multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered by great strength.” “A horse is a vain hope for safety; neither shall it deliver any by its great strength.” “Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, And to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield.” “For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name.” “Let Your mercy, O LORD, be upon us, Just as we hope in You.”

You see, this is what God was doing, to strive with Ahab in his unbelief. He gave his prophet a word to give to him. And this word would do him good, if he would believe it. He would give him this precious and powerful promise, and see what He would do with it. Doesn't God know what Ahab will do with it? Yes, he does, but this was a promise of real good, that Ahab should respond to. Why does God even bother to strive with men if He knows that they will not respond in the way that would please Him, or save them? In answering that question, we always need to remember something about God's striving with sinful men. In all of His striving with them, God is perfect in everything that He says and does. This will leave men without excuse on the Day of Judgment.

His promises are none-the-less very real. They are intended to do men good in every sense of that word. In the promise that Ahab was given, that this great multitude would be delivered into his hand that day, God would give to him, and to the people of Israel, hope. He was going to bring the counsel of a nation to nothing that day. He was going to make the plans of Ben-Hadad of no effect. He was saying to Ahab – Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; the people whom He has chosen for his own inheritance. Will you not believe this Ahab? He was saying to him – Ahab, I look out from heaven and I see all the sons of men. I fashion their hearts individually and I consider all their works.

Ahab, you will not today be saved by the multitude of an army or by your own great strength. No, my eye is on you to see if you will fear in Me, to see whether you will hope in My mercy, or whether You want Me to deliver your soul from death. It is me who kept you alive in the recent famine, and I am the One who is your Help and Shield against this vast army coming against you. Your heart would rejoice in Me, if only you would trust in Me. It was a very real offer. This was the everlasting gospel that was being preached to him. The everlasting gospel is when a prophet, or preacher, or any Christian filled with the Spirit, speaks to you and tells you of God's love and mercy in Christ for any sinner who will believe. Titus 3: 3 – “For we ourselves were once disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another, but when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Even though Ahab had never heard of the gospel as we have heard it and understand it in New Testament times, yet he had the gospel preached to him, in that God had great mercy upon him as a king. And he delivered him from all of his fears, and out of all his earthly troubles at that time. This was meant to lead him to repentance. This mercy was shown to him so that he

would trust in God. But sadly, he was disobedient. He did not believe. He was deceived, because he was serving various lusts and pleasures, and he was living in malice and envy. He was hateful and hating other people, but now he had no excuse. He had been shown great mercy and great kindness, and because he did not believe, God's wrath would remain upon him.

2nd – God's offer of bringing real hope to Ahab was sincere, but did not receive it.
(verses 22-28)

Ahab did not receive all of this perfect help of the gospel of God's mercy to his poor heart. He did not fear the Lord. To fear the Lord is to reverence Him, to hold Him in high esteem, and to have regard to His word, to do it. Not out of craven fear or begrudgingly. And so the prophet said to him in verse 22 – "Go strengthen yourself; take note, and see what you should do, for in the spring of the year the king of Syria will come up against you." Then God revealed to the prophet that Syria was going to regroup, and they would come up against him in the spring. Benhadad's servants came to him and they said that the gods of Israel were the gods of the hills, and therefore they were stronger than them.

But in the spring, they counseled him, if they fought with Israel on the plain, they would defeat them. So they did come up against Israel once again in the spring, and it says in verse 27 – "And the children of Israel were mustered and given provisions, and they went against them." "Now the children of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, while the Syrians filled the country side." Then a man of God came, and he said in verse 28 – "Thus says the Lord: Because the Syrians have said the Lord is the God of the hills, but He is not God of valleys, therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord."

So, once again the Lord intended to show great mercy in this situation, and to show Ahab and Israel how great their great need to hope in the Lord was. The Lord most certainly helped them once again, and He gave them the victory in this battle as well. It says in verse 29 – "And they encamped opposite each other for seven days." "So it was that on the seventh day the battle was joined; and the children of Israel killed one hundred thousand foot soldiers of the Syrians in one day." "But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; then a wall fell on twenty-seven thousand men who were left." "And Ben Hadad fled and went into the city, into an inner chamber." It is good for every minister of the gospel and every Christian who shares the gospel to remember this, that God is a God who would have all men and women, no matter how sinful, to repent and hope in Him for help to be delivered from all their enemies.

The greatest enemy that we have is our own sinful heart that will not trust in the Lord. But listen to Psalm 130, verses 7 and 8. "O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption." "And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities. This is what God can do for the vilest of sinners if they will hope in the Lord. What Ahab should have remembered is this truth from Lamentations 3: 21-32. "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope." "Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." "They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him." "The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him." "It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD." "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth." "Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him; let him put his mouth in the dust – there may yet be hope." "Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach." "For the Lord will not cast off forever." Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies."

If we will remember this and hope in Him, we shall be eternally safe. Let us also realize how great the Lord's power is to save, the vilest of sinners who will place their trust in Him. And let us not hesitate to preach them the gospel when we have it in our power to do so.

