

In the days of Elijah, idolatry had become the state religion; the worship of Baal was the order of the day; wickedness was rampant on every side. The enemy had indeed come in like a flood, and it looked as though there was no barrier left which could stem its devastating effects. Then it was that the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard against him, making public demonstration that the God of Israel was highly displeased with the sins of the people, and would now visit their iniquities upon them. That heavenly standard was raised aloft by the hand of Elijah.

***“And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.”(1 Kings 17:1.)***

God has never left Himself without witnesses on earth. In the darkest seasons of human history the Lord has raised up and maintained a testimony for Himself. Neither persecution nor corruption could entirely destroy it. In the days of the antediluvians, when the earth was filled with violence and all flesh had corrupted its way, Jehovah had an Enoch and a Noah to act as His mouthpieces. When the Hebrews were reduced to abject slavery in Egypt, the Most High sent forth Moses and Aaron as His ambassadors, and at every subsequent period in this history one prophet after another was sent to them. So also has it been throughout the whole course of Christendom. Elijah was the prophet on the ground at that dark hour in Israel’s history. Probably the question which now most deeply exercised Elijah was, How should he act? What could he do? He was a rude, uncultured child of the desert, and the more he pondered it, the more difficult the situation must have seemed to Elijah. No doubt, Satan whispered in his ear, “You can do nothing, the conditions are hopeless!” But there was one thing he could do; he could betake himself to the grand resource of all deeply tried souls – he could pray. And he did!

As **James 5:17** tells us ***“he prayed earnestly.”*** He prayed because he was assured that the Lord his God lived and ruled over all. He prayed because he realized that God is all-mighty and that with Him all things are possible. He prayed because he felt his own weakness and insufficiency and therefore turned to One who is clothed with might and is infinitely self-sufficient. But in order to be effectual, prayer must be grounded on the Word of God, to wit: ***“But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”*** (Heb. 11:6.) A particular passage in the Scriptures which seems to have been specially fixed on Elijah’s attention:

***“Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the Lord’s wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you.”(Deut. 11:16, 17.)***

That was exactly the crime of which Israel was now guilty; they had turned aside to worship false gods. Suppose then, that this Divinely threatened judgment should not be executed, would it not indeed appear that Jehovah was but a myth, a dead tradition? And Elijah was ***“very jealous for the Lord God of hosts,”*** and accordingly we are told that ***“he prayed earnestly that it might not rain”*** (James 5:17.) Thus we learn once more what true prayer is; it is faith laying hold of the Word of God, pleading it before Him, and saying ***“do as Thou hast said.”***

***“And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said. And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel; and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. For thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house; therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee. And now, O Lord God, thou are that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant; Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee; for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it; and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.”(2 Sam. 7:25-29.)***

Elijah *“prayed that it might not rain.”* Do you that hear these words exclaim, What a terrible prayer! Then I ask, Was it not far more terrible that the favored descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob should despise and turn away from the Lord God and blatantly insult Him by worshiping Baal? Would they desire the thrice Holy One to wink at such enormities? Are His righteous laws to be trampled upon with impunity? Shall He refuse to enforce their just penalties? What conception would men form of the Divine character if He ignored their open defiance of Himself? Let Scripture answer: *“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”* (Eccl. 8:11.) Yes, and not only so, but as God declared, *“These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.”* (Psa. 50:21.)

Ah, beloved, there is something far more dreadful than physical calamity and suffering, namely, moral delinquency and spiritual apostasy. Alas, that this is so rarely perceived today. What are crimes against man in comparison with high-handed sins against God? Likewise what are national reverses in comparison with the loss of God’s favor? The fact is that Elijah had a proper sense of values; he was *“very jealous for the Lord God of hosts,”* and therefore he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. Desperate diseases call for drastic measures. And as he prayed Elijah obtained assurance that his petition was granted, and that he must go and acquaint Ahab. Whatever danger the prophet might personally incur, both king and his subjects should learn the direct connection between the terrible drought and their sins which had occasioned it. The task which now confronted Elijah was no ordinary one, and it called for more than common courage. For an untutored rustic of the hills to appear uninvited before a king who defied Heaven was sufficient to quell the bravest; the more so when his heathen consort shrank not from slaying any who opposed her will, in fact who had already put many of God’s servants to death. What likelihood, then, was there of this lonely Gileadite escaping with his life? *“But the righteous are bold as a lion.”* (Prov. 28:1); they who are right with God are neither daunted by difficulties nor dismayed by dangers. *“I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about.”* (Psa. 3:6.) *“Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.”* (Psa. 27:3.) Such is the blessed serenity of those whose conscience is void of offense and whose trust is in the living God. The hour of the execution of his stern task had arrived, and Elijah leaves his home in Gilead to deliver unto Ahab his message of Judgment. Picture him on his long and lonely journey and what subjects must have engaged his mind. I love you. Amen.

It is time for Elijah to confront King Ahab. He makes his journey, likely reminded of the similar mission on which Moses had embarked, when he was sent by the Lord to deliver his ultimatum to the haughty monarch of Egypt. Clearly, Elijah's message which he bore would be no more palatable to the degenerate king of Israel. Yet rather should the remembrance of the sequel strengthen his faith. The Lord God had not failed his servant Moses, but had stretched forth His mighty arm on his behalf and in the end had given him full success. The wondrous works of God in the past should ever hearten His servants and saints in every age to this very day. *"When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."* (Isa. 59:19.) What is signified by the Enemy coming in *"like a flood?"* The figure used here is a graphic and expressive one; it is that of an abnormal deluge which results in the submerging of the land, the imperiling of property and life itself, threatening to carry everything before it. Aptly does such a figure depict the moral experience of the world in general, and of specially-flavored sections of it in particular, at different periods in their history. Again and again a flood of evil has broken loose, a flood of such alarming dimensions, even as we see at this very day, that it appears as though Satan would succeed in beating down everything holy before him, when by an inundation of idolatry, impiety and iniquity, the Cause of God upon earth seems in imminent danger of being completely swept away. *"When the Enemy shall come in like a flood."* We have but to read at the context to discover what is meant by such language.

***"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace. Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; In transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment."* (Isa. 59:1-15.)**

Sunday, June 23, 2013

Sermon Outline...page 4

Nevertheless, when the Devil has brought in a flood of lying errors and lawlessness has become ascendant, the Spirit of God intervenes and thwarts Satan's vile purpose. The solemn passage above accurately describes the awful conditions which obtained in Israel under the reign of Ahab and his heathen consort, Jezebel. But of their multiplied transgressions God had given up the people to blindness and darkness and a spirit of falsehood and madness possessed their hearts. In consequence, truth was fallen in the street - ruthlessly trampled underfoot by the masses. Then appeared Elijah the Tishbite to raise aloft the heavenly standard.

***“And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.”(1 Kings 17:1.)***

This memorable event occurred some seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. For the dramatic suddenness, the exceeding boldness, and the amazing character of it, there are few of a like nature in Sacred History. Unannounced and unattended, a plain man, dressed in humble garb, appeared before Israel's apostate king as the messenger of Jehovah and the herald of dire judgment. No one in the court would know much, if anything, about him, for he had just emerged from the obscurity of Gilead, to stand before Ahab with the keys of Heaven in his hand. Such are often the witnesses to His Truth which God has employed. At His bidding they come and go; not from the ranks of the influential and learned do they issue. They are not the products of this world system, nor does the world place any laurels on their brow. ***“As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” (1 Kings 17:1.)*** There is much more in this expression ***“the Lord God of Israel liveth”*** than meets the eye at first glance. Observe that it is not simply ***“the Lord God liveth,”*** but ***“the Lord God of Israel,”*** which is also to be distinguished from the wider term “the Lord of hosts.”

At least three things were signified thereby. First, ***“the Lord God of Israel”*** threw particular emphasis upon his special relationship of the favored Nation; Jehovah was their King, their Ruler, the One with whom they had to do, the One with whom they had entered into a solemn covenant. Second, Ahab is thereby informed that He LIVETH. This grand fact had evidently been called into question. During the reigns of one king after another Israel had openly mocked and defied Jehovah, and no dire consequences had followed; and so the false idea had come to prevail that the Lord had no real existence. Third, this affirmation, ***“the Lord God of Israel liveth,”*** pointed a striking contrast from the lifeless idols whose impotence should now be made apparent – unable to defend their deluded votaries from the wrath of God. Though for wise reasons of His own, ***“God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction;” (Rom. 9:22.)***, yet He affords clear and sufficient proof throughout the course of human history and down to this very day, that He is the Governor of the wicked and the Avenger of sin. Such a proof was then given to Israel. Even as with America, notwithstanding the peace and prosperity which that kingdom had long enjoyed, the Lord was highly incensed at the gross manner in which He had been publicly insulted, and the time had arrived for Him to severely chasten the wayward people. Accordingly, He sent Elijah to Ahab to announce the nature and duration of His scourge, and He has sent Westboro Baptist Church to tell America the nature of their coming and pending destruction. I love you. Amen.