

Sermon 14: Unusual Ministries in Difficult Times: 1 Kings 18:1-18

Text: 1 Kings 18:1-18 "And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria. And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly: For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah? And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid an hundred men of the LORD'S prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me. And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah. And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim..."

Introduction:

- **History tends to go through cycles and over the course of a long life, most people will live through several phases of that history.**
 - Strong generations battle through struggle and establish stability.
 - Their children are often complacent and rebel against institutions and norms.

- That rebellion leads to national struggle and cultural crisis.
- Out of chaos strong leadership will immerge and persevere to establish new norms.
- A new period of “normalcy” follows this cycle only to be repeated.
- **The story of Israel’s judges:**
 - **Peace:** God blessed His people, and they enjoyed His blessing.
 - **Apostasy:** They became complacent and rebelled against Him.
 - **Judgment:** He removed His blessing and permitted their enemies to be strengthened against them.
 - **Repentance:** God humbled the people and drew them to Himself.
 - **Deliverance:** God’s gracious raised up and deliverer to reestablish stability.
 - **Peace:** The people enjoyed God’s blessing through the lifetime of that judge.

Summary: God preserves His people through the darkest seasons of history and plants them in unusual places for His glory.

Proposition: He wants us to faithfully serve Him wherever He plants us.

Truth 1: God preserves His remnant: 18:1-3 “And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria. And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly) ...”

- **The struggles of those years:**
 - Spiritual darkness
 - Intense religious persecution
 - Famine and desperation
 - Two significant Syrian invasions
- **Specific struggles for Obadiah:**
 - He was close to Ahab as a steward over his household.
 - He would have personally interacted with Jezebel.
 - He would have constantly dealt with issues of conscience.
- **Obadiah’s position and a history of God’s providence:**
 - Joseph in Egypt
 - Namaan’s servant
 - Daniel in Babylon
 - Nehemiah in Persia
 - Esther and Mordecai in Persia
 - Joanna in Herod’s household
 - Members of Caesar’s household

Truth 2: Their ministry is unique: 18:4 "When Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water..."

- **God used this man to preserve the lives of 100 prophets.**
- **While Elijah was being sustained by ravens, Obadiah was hiding and feeding those prophets.**
- **While Elijah was being sustained by the widow at Zarephath, Obadiah was hiding and feeding those prophets.**
- **His position gave him access to provision for three and a half years.**
- **His ministry also put him in constant danger during that time.**
- **Elijah was unaware of Obadiah's ministry or the success of his ministry:**
 - **At Mount Carmel: 1 Kings 18:22** "Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men..."
 - **At Mount Horeb: 1 Kings 19:10** "I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away..."
- **God had people in the land despite the darkness of those days: 1 Kings 19:18** "I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him..."

Truth 3: He delivers in His own time and way: 18:14-16 "Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me. And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah..."

- **There is a very human side to how God works:**
 - **God sent Elijah with a message: 18:1-2** "And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab.
 - **In His providence, Elijah met Obadiah: 18:7** "And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah?"
 - **Elijah sent Obadiah to facilitate his meeting with Ahab: 18:8** "Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here..."
 - **Obadiah expressed his fears: 18:9-12** "What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to

slay me? As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me..."

- **Elijah assured Obadiah that he would stay to meet Ahab: 18:15-16** "And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. ¹⁶ So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah.
- **Ahab was unsurprising confrontational: 18:17** "And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?
- **Elijah spoke the truth bluntly: 18:18** And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim..."
- **There is a mysterious side: Proverbs 20:24** "Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?"
 - **As God works we often do not see it until later.**
 - **Here is the part of the story Elijah did not know until he lived through it: 18:36-37** "And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again..."

Applying the passage:

- God is always working even during the dark seasons of history.
- His work extends far beyond our limited sphere.
- He is free to work in each individual life as He sees fit.
- He puts people in unprecedented places and uses them there.
- There is a very ordinary side to the mystery of God's providence.
- We must purpose to be faithful wherever we are and in whatever circumstances we encounter.
- Be faithful and serve God humbly wherever He plants you!