

A Good Man in a Hard Place – 1 Kings 18:1-18

Song: Days of Elijah

Truly these are the Days of Elijah. And here's a couple of reasons why that song is true for our time:

The Word of the Lord is being declared. At no time in history have we have more means and methods to reach people with the Gospel as we have today.

Righteousness is being restored. We are seeing this in the lives of individuals and families – perhaps that's why you're here this morning for **National Back to Church Sunday**. (something that happens every year at this time, but today feels different). There's just a special energy in the air as we turn our hearts back to God. And we're so glad you're here today.

These are the days of Elijah as we've been singing – and these are the Days of Ezekiel. Right now we are seeing a great move of God all over our nation and around the world. We are seeing young people coming alive – people are listening to the voice of the Lord because as a nation we've become so calloused and empty. And so hearts are open to the Gospel as dry bones become as flesh.

These are the days of David as we rebuild a temple of praise. Today we are seeing a new passion and energy for worship – and you feel it in this room. The heart of worship being restored!

And truly (as we have sang) – **the fields are ripe in this world.** Friends inviting friends, neighbors and co-workers reaching out to those they care about and love.

TURN TO SOMEONE AND SAY – These are the Days of Elijah! (Can we give God a praise?)

You see – here's what I love about this man (and we're in a new series on Elijah):

Though many of his day has compromised with evil and had disqualified themselves for service to God, Elijah went in the opposite direction.

The more evil the culture became, the more strongly he stood.

And it was his uncompromised stand for God that allowed him to change the course of his nation!

Elijah fully understood – “There's no God like Jehovah!” Amen.

PRAY

This morning we're going to look at the first half of 1 Kings 18. (Reaching through the Life of Elijah). **A Good Man in a Hard Place (FIND ONE THING TO HANG ON TO)**

Throughout my life, I have observed that God's servants are found in some of the most surprising places.

Elijah served in a very dark time in the history of God's people. King Ahab and his wife Jezebel were in charge (both dangerous and murderous).

They were worshippers of a god named Baal, a violent and degraded religion with everything from temple prostitutes to child sacrifice. (And God said, “Enough!”)

And so He sends the fiery prophet Elijah (who appeared out of nowhere) to confront the king on God's behalf.

And here was the message: unless you change there will be no rain or dew in the land except by the Word of the Lord.

Elijah shows up, makes the announcement to the king, and then he just disappears. He vanishes into thin air and takes the rain with him.

And just like that, the weather report in Israel was the same day after day—clear skies, lots of sunshine, not a cloud in sight, stifling heat. Day after day, for 3.5 years. (God is trying to get the King's attention).

In the meantime, God sends Elijah far away into the mountains east of the Jordan River.

For a while he drinks from a trickling brook and is fed by, of all things, ravens.

Eventually, the brook dries up, and so God sends him to a town called Zarephath to be provided for by a poor widow. That's where he is when our story starts today.

1 Kings 18:1

Here's something I love about Elijah – he waited on the Lord. Listen – you and I cannot make things happen. Elijah could not make things happen – and we are foolish to try to make things happen in our own strength.

Waiting on the Lord is one of the hardest things in the world to do (which means virtually doing nothing until God gives the signal).

But I've learned – that God often works this way, choosing to do things in seasons. And we have to wait on a word from the Lord.

Have you noticed – that important things happen between seasons?

So – don't confuse God's silence with inactivity.

You want a good verse if you are in a period of waiting? Jesus says in John 5:17 – "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." (Somebody needs to hear that today. Just because you can't see him, doesn't mean he isn't working – right?) God is always at work, even in our seasons of waiting. Perhaps more powerfully than when we see what he is doing.

Or here's a good verse – Jesus goes on to say in John 13:7, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." (Who needs to hear that?)

There is never a day – or a split second – when God is not working.

Elijah waits – but while he waits on a word from the Lord, Ahab scours the countryside looking for Elijah.

As the days passed, the fields began turning brown, the soil becoming cracked and hard; no crops, no hay, undernourished livestock).

The king believed he had to do something! So he stopped at nothing to find Elijah. He even sent soldiers on a manhunt to the surrounding nations.

As Ahab searched day after day, finally the word of the Lord came again to Elijah: "After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: 'Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.' So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab" **(1 Kings 18:1-2a)**.

I wonder how Elijah felt about that. On the one hand, he understood the danger, but I think he was glad to get on with it. Elijah was a man of action. During those three years in hiding, he must have wondered why he was passing the time at a widow's house while wickedness spread among God's people.

But to his credit, he waited until God gave him a green light to go back.

So he heads out to confront Ahab; but as it turns out, he's not the only man of God around.

As he traveled to Samaria, he met a man named Obadiah (By the way, there is a book in the OT named Obadiah, but since this Obadiah lived 300 years earlier, this is not him). So here's the OG Obadiah.

In almost every way you can think of he was different from Elijah, but Obadiah was also a servant of God. And like Elijah, he served God in a very surprising place.

Read 2b-4 *(4 – Jezebel attacked the prophets of God with a hit list that included every seminary student in the country. Reminds me of Justin Trudeau during COVID – who shut down the churches, but the casinos stayed open).*

Obadiah is a very intriguing character. We learn several things about him here.

1. **First, he was Ahab's chief of staff, the guy who kept things running smoothly.** He must have had considerable talent because he had a ton of responsibility.

He oversaw the servants, the waiters, and the king's appointments. No doubt Ahab trusted Obadiah.

Obadiah was like Mr. Carson on *Downton Abbey*. He was the guy behind the scenes who made it all happen.

2. **Another thing we learn about Obadiah is he was a devout believer in the Lord.** Later in the story he says he's worshipped the Lord since his youth.

Some people wonder how a godly man could end up in charge of Ahab's palace, considering how wicked it was.

But all through scripture we see that God often places his greatest servants in the darkest of places – and he used them there for great influence.

- Joseph was placed at the right hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt: not an easy place to be for a believer, but God used him to supply food for the family of God. OR
- Daniel – the man of faith and courage in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar;
- Esther was placed in the court of the king of Persia, but through her God's people would be delivered from a holocaust.

How did they get into these positions? They were gifted, and trustworthy, and somehow, in the midst of it, they were godly.

As you can see, Obadiah wasn't the first devout believer God put in a dark place.

And so what you see is - different believers have different callings.

Elijah was called to **overtly** confront evil from the **outside**, while Obadiah was called to **subversively work** to overcome it from **within**.

(By the way – do you think Obadiah, as a man of faith, was good at his job? Of course he was. He served his master faithfully **(Read 5-6)**).

(I remember discussing this passage once, and Steve Simon, one of our shepherds said, “The fact that at times I worked for demanding and unchristian bosses, didn’t give me a reason not to do my best.” The Bible says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all of your heart, as working for the Lord, and not for men.”)

I ran into a brother that does just that everyday – **Allen Cunningham**. A nail – no, a bolt – in my tire. And Allen said, “Bring it to me.” He’s capable, knows what he’s doing, shows up everyday – and you can tell the guys that work with him – even his boss who came out to say hello – love and respect this man.

I'd guess that most of you have callings more like Obadiah than Elijah.

Obadiah was faithful in the works of his hand.

And then something else stands out for me:

3. **Obadiah was a good man in a hard place who did the right thing when it mattered most.**

When action was needed, he was willing to risk his neck for the Lord.

When Jezebel began killing the Lord's prophets, Obadiah began to hide them from her and fed them with food and water at a time when it was quite scarce.

Obadiah wasn't just a believer by profession. He walked his talk. He's willing to step out and take a risk.

Jezebel is killing God's prophets, and her husband's chief of staff is hiding them in caves!

So if you desire to follow God in this culture, there are going to be times where you will have to take a stand. (Because here’s a fact – many of you face a world on Monday morning that is entirely different from the world you worship in at the House of God on Sunday morning).

Being a light in a dark place means that God asks us to stand out sometimes. And that involves risk.

So where is the place you need to take a bold and risky stand for God? Obadiah just laid it all on the line.

He was a good man in a hard place who did the right thing when it mattered most.

Listen – when you go to work tomorrow, remember: God has placed you where you are for a purpose – you just may have not seen it yet. Are you willing to trust him and take a risk when the opportunity presents itself?

Obadiah is a faithful, trustworthy man. And so Ahab sends him on a mission to find grass for his animals.

(Can I just say something here about Ahab? Everything Obadiah is, Ahab is not).

The famine is so severe – prophets are dying. Obadiah is risking his life to save them.

And here's Ahab – SEEKING GRASS INSTEAD OF SEEKING GOD. (and you can take that any way you want to – can I get an amen?)

He's more concerned about saving his horses than he is saving his people.

He's looking for a quick fix, instead of the necessary deep change – repentance, caring for his people instead of his possessions. looking at his own heart – “Lord, I was wrong.”

(Interestingly, there was another time God brought famine on the land – and in that time, there was another king who responded differently. 2 Samuel 21:1 – “During the reign of David, there was a famine for three consecutive years; so David sought the face of the Lord.”)

One looks for grass, the other looks for God.

(Maybe all of us should ask, especially when we feel like there's a drought of blessing in our own lives – is this happening because God trying to get my attention? And if he is, where do I need to focus on deep change?

Ahab was so hard-hearted, he missed the whole thing.

So while Ahab searches for grass in one direction, he sends Obadiah in the other direction.

And we pick up in **verse 7-15** (verse 10 – *can you imagine the leader of a nation, investigating other nations and their kings to try and find you? You're talking about an international investigation*).

Now – does it seem to you that there's some tension in this meeting?

Elijah needs Obadiah to go back and arrange the meeting with Ahab.

But it's clear Obadiah fears going back to Ahab with news he's found Elijah. This could cost him his life.

Ahab has had an APB out on Elijah for three years. And so Obadiah's thinking,

- *And now you want me to tell Ahab I found you, and you want to see him?*
- *You have a habit of disappearing, Elijah. Where have you been the last three years?*
- *What if the Spirit of God just wisps you away again? Haven't you heard I've been hiding the Lord's prophets from Jezebel?*
- *Why would you want to get me killed? I love the Lord just like you do!*
- *And I just love this part when he says and by the way, haven't you heard how I've worshipped the Lord since my youth?*

(Which should encourage every parent, because it gives us hope that our children don't have to fit into the common narrative of becoming rebels. They don't have to. WE NEED

YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE OBADIAH! We need leaders who have, even in their youth, history with God!

I think a lot of parents just expect children to drift away from the Lord, and you just need to brace yourself for impact and hope they come back sooner than later. But who says that has to be their story? - *Doesn't mean they will be perfect!*

But here's what I want to say – if you are a servant of God, never discount your testimony!

Never say, “I’m just a plain, old boring Christian – I don’t have any dramatic roller coaster to my testimony.” I’m telling you – we need all kinds of people in the Kingdom of God. Don’t ever discount that testimony.

The fact that you have served God faithfully for years is a testimony. It’s who other people need and look to as solid counsel, a safe harbor in the storm. Rejoice in that. If your testimony is 2 minutes long, we’re going to rejoice in that just like we do with the one who was raised up from the mud and the mire.

He shows us it’s possible to be young and fear the Lord.

Yesterday, Mitzi and I attended a wedding, and the preacher said something that was just so good. He said, “What you build your marriage ON together will be far more important than what you build UP together.” Good counsel. How much investment are you making in what you build ON?

And so, Elijah hears him and reassures him – **verse 15-18** (Here’s what I loved – although they were different in the nature of their service, they met face to face, and neither

one clicked the “unfriend” button. They just kept serving as God directed them.

Aren’t you thankful – that God uses different kinds of people in his service? Men and women with different gifts, personalities, and callings?

Look at it this way: In the Old Testament, the Lord uses prophets, priests, and politicians (kings).

- **Prophets** are called by God to speak truth. They condemn sin and call people to righteousness.
- **Priests** are called to comfort hurting people and intercede for them before God.
- **Politicians** (kings) are called to make decisions and establish policy to bless their people.

Consider how these three callings might approach a difficult moral issue like abortion. The prophet will denounce it. The priest will minister to those hurt by it. And the politician will try to figure out how to pass legislation to save the unborn. And all three are using their calling to make a difference.

My experience is prophets rarely appreciate priests, and priests don't appreciate prophets, and neither appreciate politicians!

Prophets often look at priests as soft and weak, while priests see prophets as harsh and uncaring. They both see politicians as compromised.

But all three are called by the Lord and have important jobs to do.

And so – I’m a preacher.

I'm not a political commentator – it's not my job, it is not my calling, it is not my profession. I do not feel like it is my role as a pastor to speak on politics.

I am not a social commentator — even though I believe the gospel does impact how we live in society.

My job is not to be a social commentator; my job as a pastor IS to teach the Word of God (which is what we do in this house).

And we can pass all the laws, we can say all the right things – but if the heart of man doesn't change, ultimately nothing will change.

And the only thing that will change the heart of man is Christ, and the only message by which we understand Christ is the Word of God.

And the only power for change – is prayer.

Seasons will come and go – and all of them ultimately will pass. But the Word of the Lord will stand forever.

And so we proclaim the Word – and we pray. Because we want to see hearts changed.

Children turning back to fathers, and fathers to children.

We know that God doesn't want anyone to perish, but all to come to a knowledge of the truth.

I just want to encourage you this morning to take with you a couple of things:

1. **The best of God's people, like Obadiah, sometimes struggle with fear and doubt.** So if that's you, give

yourself a break. Never put yourself down because of anxieties and fears – we all have them. Being nervous or scarred does not mean you lack faith, of that you do not love the Lord as you should.

Courage is not the absence of fear.

John Wayne said, "Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway."

There are many ways to serve the Kingdom of God.

Several years ago, *Leadership Magazine* included a story about a B-17 bombing run over a German city during World War II. Nazi anti-aircraft flak hit the gas tanks of the bomber. No explosion.

The morning after the raid the pilot went down to ask the crew chief for the shell that had hit the gas tank; he wanted it for a souvenir. The crew chief indicated there were eleven unexploded shells in the gas tank! The shells had been sent to the armorers to be defused. The armorers had found that the shells contained no explosive charge; they were empty.

All but one. It contained a rolled-up note, written in Czech. Finally, Intelligence found someone on the base who could read Czech. Translation: "*This is all we can do for you now.*"

Here were these Czechs who were compelled to work in a munitions plant for the Nazi war effort.

They didn't try to blow up the plant or assassinate Hitler. They simply didn't put charges in some of the shells they produced. It was all very quiet and unnoticed but worked salvation all the same. Such is frequently God's way for his people.

Not all his work is noisy or dramatic.

2. If you're an Obadiah (which is 90% of us), embrace your testimony.

I hear this a lot – sometimes you hear someone's testimony, and you feel “less than” in some way because you think, “Man, I don't have a testimony like that. Nobody's gonna give me a book deal for my testimony.”

Can I just say this – “Embrace what you think is your boring testimony.”

Because think about it: up to this point in our story, who's saved the most people? Fiery Elijah, or Obadiah? (And you know the answer).

While Elijah was confronting kings, Obadiah quietly and courageously and unassumingly, saved 100 men of God.

And it was something no one even noticed.

Embrace your testimony.

(You see that in Acts 9 – Saul has this amazing testimony – “I was a murderer, but a light from heaven struck me down and saved my soul.” And right there in the same chapter, there's a young lady named Tabitha who the Bible says, “was always doing good and helping the poor.” (What some would say is a boring testimony). And yet the influence of her life is so incredibly important, God records her testimony in His Word for all time to come.

Embrace your testimony! Never apologize for what God is doing through you – because in the end, it's God that gets the glory!

3. Lastly, remember: the work of God in the world depends on men and women of faith who stand firm regardless of the fallout. (No matter what the situation or the outcome, you're just going to do the right thing).

So if you live down Cravens Road here in Savannah, you might recognize this roadside picture. In fact, some of you pass by it every day.

It's this one stalk of corn, and it's been there all summer long. And it's truly amazing.

Cars blow by – and it sways, but it doesn't bend.

And the heat bears down – but there it stands.

And the soil is hard – and the ground is dry – and it hasn't rained in weeks.

And yet despite all the trials – it bears fruit.

Listen – what you do matters.

And one day (and it may be very soon) Jesus will return.

And we read in the last chapter of Revelation:

The time is near. Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy.

Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Revelation 22:10-13).

It matters how you live – whether you're an Ahab, or an Obadiah.

What you build ON, is more important than what you build UP.

PRAYER